

THE CAMEO LADY

FRANCES A. HARRIS

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THE CAMEO LADY

FRANCES ALLEN HARRIS

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BY

FRANCES ALLEN HARRIS



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TO
THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER AND MOTHER

THE CAMEO LADY

The Cameo Lady

I

It was a great thing to be grown up. It meant that I had come into the possession of a new world. It was just regal for every one to be doing this and that and the other because I was eighteen. For I was eighteen years old that mid-summer night, and my mother was giving me a party. I was a young lady then, and all the world would know it. Splendid! Everybody for miles around was coming to my party, and of course each person knew the reason for the party. Stella Battle was a young lady now. Oh, my! I glanced hastily at my much flounced and beribboned costume as I heard the clatter of horses' feet and the noise of buggy-wheels on the pike, and clapped my hands.

"They are coming!" I exclaimed gayly.

I tripped through the rooms to the front veranda and surveyed the yard. Out there Japanese lanterns seemed to be stars dropped down where one could see what they were really like while they went on with their light. Yet up above in the old places there were plenty left. Other vehicles sounded in the distance.

“They were coming!” I danced across the long veranda to the music of my heart. There was no need for other, for somehow at that hour I was wild with joy.

But there was other music. The band came. It was composed of amateur musicians, who at that time received numerous invitations from the people of the community who wished to lend encouragement to the new organization and also to get the benefit of the performances. In short, everybody came, it seemed, to do me honor on that occasion; at least, so I thought then. The house was full, and the yard was full. Both the young men and the maidens made beautiful little speeches to me, wishing I might live forever, or something to that effect, and enjoy every minute of the time. It was lovely! We had a long table stretched across the big living-room, from the northeast corner to the southwest corner, and not a vacant inch on it. Where so many things to eat ever came from no one but Mother ever knew, unless Father had an idea. The lamps and the candles and all the pretty dishes helped to create the glamor that prevailed. The guests stood around the room, against the wall, and everywhere while they ate, for there were too many to find seats. I flitted about among them like a bird of the forest, never tarrying long at any one post; not that I was pretending to serve the repast, for that was done by capable hands. Chiefly, I was giving expression to my pleasure and the lightness of my heart. Once I encountered Father, who accosted me with the words:

“Why don’t you have your company sit down? Shame to have folks stand up while they eat.”

In answer, I threw my arms around his blessed neck and smacked him soundly in the neighborhood of his whiskers, and said:

“Don’t you know that I don’t have anything to do with it all, except just to be eighteen? I am your young lady now, Daddy.”

Father patted my head.

“If you want to know about chairs, or any other such common articles, you must ask Big Sugar Lump; she knows. She and Mother have had their heads together for weeks, and I didn’t know until yesterday what it was all about.”

“Oh! that’s all right, Uncle,” my big cousin explained. “Young people do not mind standing.”

Then she went on, edging her way through the crowd, with the dish that she was passing. But she called back:

“I bet you have danced till four o’clock in the morning when you were young and didn’t know it was ten.”

“Then plowed the next day,” my father answered. “What times the youngsters had those days!”

“They could hardly have done better than I am doing now,” I put in.

“I don’t know about that. I think they did.”

“Couldn’t! Don’t contradict me now, or I’ll buss you again before the company.”

“Buss your old daddy all you please before you give some one of these young fellows the

right to buss you back. That's the way of it. That's the way it is. Fetch up a girl, spend your money on her, lay awake o' nights, planning, so things will come out right for her. Then about the time you are ready to enjoy your educated daughter, with her ministering to you, here comes along some wild buck or other, and she ups and throws herself away on him."

"Hush!" called Big Sugar Lump from a distant part of the room, "you shouldn't talk that way. Why, didn't you marry some man's daughter? Don't you think some other man then has a right to marry your daughter? Certainly he has. There may be a prospective here tonight. Who knows?"

Significant giggling could be heard from a corner, but I didn't look in that direction, for I knew well enough who was over there and why the crowd giggled. For people teased Emery Humphry about me, and they teased me about him. But, pshaw! Emmy was just a nice kind of boy. He wasn't anything great like a sweetheart. Still people couldn't tell about all that, I supposed, and we did have some good times together. Moreover, that very night he waited around until everybody else had left, and then he drew a little box out of his pocket and opened it and said:

"I knew this was your birthday, though not many did until they got here. I knew how old you were, too. Now how do you like the present I have brought you?"

Emmy held up a tiny gold chain with a little heart-shaped locket on it.

"I want you to keep this all your life," he went on to say. "Let's put it on and see how it looks on you."

I gasped. At last I found my breath long enough to ejaculate:

"Emmy, you don't mean it!"

"Yes, I do! This is a monstrous little *ketch*, but I believe it works all right. Here!"

With the word he fastened the chain around my neck.

"I do declare! How came you to think of such a fine present? A locket and chain! Gold?"

"I don't think it's brass," Emmy answered with a laugh.

"Why, Emmy!"

Then I removed the article to look at it myself.

"It's a dear!" I exclaimed. "Oh, Emmy, Emmy!"

I threw my arms around him and hugged him. Finally he managed to find a chance to say:

"I am glad you like it." Then he added: "You are the sweetest girl in the world, Stella. The very sweetest! I want you to keep this present all your life and remember that I gave it to you on your eighteenth birthday, and that we have been good friends and have had happy times together. The little gold heart signifies my sincere good wishes for you all your life."

"How lovely! Emmy, you're a dear—that's

what you are. For all my life! Beautiful gold heart to mean so much."

I kissed the little article that I held in my hand.

"They tell us that life holds a good many kinds of places for people," Emmy stated, as if he were trying to recall a text. "We don't know what's before you, but I want my representative there to go with you. I hope the future may be as good as the past."

"Of course it will be! Emmy, you alarm me."

"No, no! not that. There, the old rooster is crowing. Late! I must go."

He had reached the door when I called:

"Emmy, oh, Emmy! Wait a minute. You know I am afraid I ought not to keep your present. I 'spose it would be all right and proper for just a little girl to, but you see I am a young lady now. I have heard—in fact, Mother has told me—that it wasn't proper for a young lady to accept gifts of value from a gentleman unless—she was engaged to him."

Emmy laughed. I could hear another boyish laugh when he closed the yard gate. I lingered in the parlor a while, still resting my arms on the piano as I had been standing. Then I set about closing the blinds and putting out the light. When I reached my chamber upstairs my cousin was there and my mother was in the act of leaving the room.

"Everything went off grand," said Big Sugar Lump. "You are just about the prettiest eighteen year old girl I ever saw. Come

here and let Big Sugar Lump give you a thousand kisses. Aunt Jessamine, didn't she carry out everything like a queen? Weren't you proud of her?"

"I reckon Stella knows that she is very much loved and admired in her home and in her community, too. I wouldn't have her different from what she is if I could change her."

"You wouldn't? Mother dear!"

I flew at the dear soul and showered her with kisses. I hung over her shoulder some little bit, wanting to make a confession, and then deciding to postpone it.

"Good night," said my mother at last. "You have had a happy childhood, dear. May the coming years hold no trial or sorrow, except such as may be necessary to enrich your spirit. God bless you!"

As Mother went down the hall, I dropped into a chair within my room and burst out crying.

"What on earth is the matter?" Big Sugar Lump inquired with concern.

I did not answer at once, but finally I said:

"I don't know exactly, Big Sugar Lump, but I feel all upset in my feelings. I think it's because I am a young lady now. I don't know that it's so grand after all. Just think, I have left off being a child—can't ever be one any more—and I like being a child and having you all love me and make over me and everything. Must put on dignity now and act grown up, I suppose. Oh, my!"

Big Sugar Lump laughed and tried to comfort me by saying:

“Don’t worry; you are not so very much grown up yet.”

Big Sugar Lump was like an elder sister. She stayed at our house much of the time. She was left a widow when young. She was big both in body and in heart. Like every one else at the old home, she was always a part of my life.

That night when I heard her snoring I slipped quietly from the room to the roof of the veranda, where I lay down and looked into the vast, starry dome above me, and wondered about everything in general and my own life in particular. A screech-owl and a tree-frog rendered a duet from the big trees on the lawn. The water at the bottom of the low hill gently murmured as it moved along its course. I had no intention of going to sleep out there, but I must have done so, for, by and by, I heard Philip calling the cows, and I opened my eyes on the early dawn.

II

Somewhat to my astonishment I found life going on about the same, even if I'd had an eighteenth birthday. At least it did so for a time. Then there came a change. I became occupied with visitors, leaving off books and piano practice, too, to a great extent. I entertained friends from afar and near. I had only to say, "Mother, so and so will be here on a certain day," to find the house in readiness and a feast spread for the occasion. A carriage was always at my beck and call. It seemed the pleasure of my parents to keep something of an open house on my account. I heard nothing of its being taxing or burdensome. So I spent my days for a while, cultivating the best society of our locality, and, in turn, being cultivated by it. Young men came to call; a goodly number of them. Nor did they stop with a single visit. I enjoyed talking with them, if they were attractive, and they frequently were. I made friends among them, but I said, "Halt," when the sweetheart line was approached. I didn't know that I wanted to have anything to do with sweethearts. A sweetheart seemed an encroachment on freedom and independence. I loved both. My! I suppose I was generally spoiled and selfish. If the young men had really known me, they would likely have halted of their own ac-

cord before they reached the danger line. However, they continued to gather around me. I was vivacious. In short, I had more beaux than you could shake a stick at. I wondered myself why it was so, for I took no pride in being a conqueror of hearts. Indeed I made no conscious effort in that way. Such attentions seemed only a part of the fullness of life—a natural part—that came to me then. Little did I know, could I know, what a fountain of strength and comfort all that I received in those days, of kindness and love and admiration, would afterwards mean to me. But they became the jewels indestructible that I carried in my breast. Fortune often chooses a long and winding way to gain its ends. So it chose with me.

A year after my birthday party I had advanced very much in my knowledge of people and in my way of thinking. I was really a little more grown up, though Big Sugar Lump declared that I was of the sort that never grew up entirely, no matter how many years went by. Big Sugar Lump kept up with me and my beaux, offering me friendly advice as she saw fit. One day she asked me rather abruptly:

“Stella, do you ever think of getting married?”

“Of course not,” I answered.

“Of course *not!*”

“Why should I want to get married? I have everything and I live with the people I love best and who love me best.”

“You have got an old head in some ways after all, but, my dear girl, things here will

change. They cannot always stay as they are now. Time brings changes, perhaps slowly, but certainly surely. By and by your home here will be different."

I was silent and thoughtful for a while. At length I said:

"I cannot see what good could come of my marrying."

"Why, a husband is the dearest friend you can have in this world."

"Oh my! a husband would be a nuisance."

"The very dearest friend. I know, because I was very happy with mine the six months that he lived."

"Six months! But I'd probably get one that would live for sixty years."

Big Sugar Lump opened her mouth in horror and looked at me over her embroidery frames.

I scrambled up from the floor where I was sitting and put my arms around her neck, patted her hair and kissed her forehead.

"I suppose I seem awfully wicked," I said. "I'm sorry for *you*, but it would be dreadful to me to be tied to a man for ever and ever."

"No, it wouldn't. If he were kind to you, you would grow to love him better and better. Don't you know how dependent married people are upon each other? Haven't you noticed? Neither is much account without the other."

I turned away and went to the window. A new idea was forming in my brain. Afterwards I looked among my acquaintances for the possible husband, but I ended for a time, at least, by shaking my head over results. He wasn't

there. One afternoon Emmy came to take me driving. Said he was breaking his young horse to the buggy and wanted to get in some training. Mother heard the conversation, and called out:

“Emery, you will break Stella’s neck yet. Is your horse wild?”

“No’m! He’s just shy and needs to get used to the harness; that’s all.”

Every now and then that young man came along with a horse he was trying to break, and Mother stood in dread of the occasions. She said she believed driving wild horses was Emmy’s chief form of recklessness, but she wished he wouldn’t insist upon taking me along. I was always glad to go, for Emmy could manage the animals and I enjoyed the sport. That afternoon Mother followed to see how the horse behaved. Emmy drove toward the stile where I was standing, and, as the horse came opposite, he suddenly rose to his hind feet, showing every intention of traveling in that position. Emmy’s face got pretty red. Finally, he turned, letting the horse face the opposite direction, and called out:

“Stella, please come here and get in; the horse doesn’t like the stile.”

As I jumped to the ground Mother announced:

“She’s not going! You’d better stay yourself, Emery Humphry. That horse will kill you.”

“Oh, no’m!” declared Emmy; “he’s just shy and unused to driving. He will tame down

soon. Come on, Stella, please; you see he's restless."

"No, she won't come on," called out Mother. "I tell you you'll break her neck."

"Please, Mother," I begged. "I am not afraid. Emmy knows all about horses. He can handle the creature."

With that I ran to the buggy and succeeded at last in finding the vehicle still long enough for me to risk the climb. As the horse pranced off, I waved to Mother, and she shook her fist at me. However, after getting fairly on the road, the animal went along in a manner that would have given even my anxious parent small chance for complaint. But the main thing that I set out to tell was what occurred that afternoon between Emmy and me. I had had it on my mind to talk to Emmy about the idea that Big Sugar Lump put into my head that other day. I had always found that he had pretty good judgment. So, on the way home, I was just about to open the subject when Emmy turned his face to me and said:

"Stella, we are both getting older."

"Yes," I admitted.

"Have you ever thought about it's being time for us to settle in life?"

"Yes, a little."

"When I see our friends marrying off, it puts me to thinking about what I am going to do."

I was silent and the least bit alarmed. I didn't want Emmy to say anything like that and spoil our friendship. So I hurried up.

“Why, you seem to be doing very well,” I remarked.

“But I said, ‘about what I am going to do.’ You needn’t try to side-track me. For I have had my mind made up that I would ask you what you thought of me for a husband. You needn’t hurry with your answer. Of course this is sudden and surprising to you.”

I laughed a little.

“We have been friends all our lives,” Emmy ran on. “I have just enjoyed your friendship without thinking much about the outcome. But now someone else may come along and take you away.”

“How strange such talk seems.”

As I made the remark I felt the blood rushing to my face.

“Well, it does,” admitted Emmy. “But what else can I do? I don’t want anybody else to have you. Still, I am not in a position to offer to marry you at once. You have always been accustomed to plenty, and I wouldn’t want to starve you. I intend to make good though. In the meantime you might be thinking of me in the light of your future husband. Don’t you think you can?”

“Mercy, Emmy, I couldn’t think of you in so detestable a way as I think of my future husband, if I am to have one. Why, I despise him—my future husband! The great old nuisance, always in my way, and probably telling me what I shall do and what I shall not do, as if I haven’t done as I pleased all my life.”

“Ha, ha! So you despise him, do you? Your

future husband. Well, I don't bid for any of that. I'd want my wife to think a lot of me."

"I think a lot of you, Emmy, for that matter."

"Well, then, just don't bother about the other for a while. We will go along having good times together as we have always done. By the way, Grover Folk will be at our house soon. He is some sort of cousin. A young doctor. Pretty smart fellow, I reckon. I'd like to bring him down to see you while he is here."

"Very well."

When Emmy bade me goodbye that evening, for evening had come when we reached home, he did what he had never done before—he carried my hand to his lips and afterwards pressed it against his cheek. I wondered what book Emmy got that out of. I was amused and a little depressed too, for the act must have been a regular lover-like one—so I supposed.

III

A few days later I was wandering along the banks of the creek, plucking leaves of the peppermint that grew there in wild profusion, when I saw our horse and sled coming down the road. As they drew nearer I noticed that the driver was a stranger. Philip! What had become of Philip? Watching then I saw that he lay stretched at full length on the boards across the sled. Something had happened. The party passed through the big gate toward the house, and I left off gathering the mint and followed. The sled stopped, and the driver proceeded to fasten the horse to the hitching-post near. Philip rose to a sitting posture, and his companion called out:

“Wait. Better let me help you.”

“What on earth?” I asked. “Philip, what have you done to yourself that you need to get your head bound up like that?”

“Ask him,” Philip answered, pointing to the stranger. “I don’t recollect. ’Pears I can’t tell much about it, but I felt a mighty heap for a little bit.”

The stranger finished tying the horse, and then turned to me, lifting his hat, and said:

“I was strolling along the pike this side of the Humphry home where I am visiting, and, as the sled drew near, the horse began kicking

and struck the young man on the head. Made a deep gash—knocked him senseless for a time. The gears were broken and sliding off the animal. When I got them tied up the horse quieted down and quit his kicking. Then I got to the young man.”

“Well, I would have gone for him first and let the horse kick. Much hurt, you say? You must be Doctor Folk.”

“Folk is my name, and I happen to be a bit of a physician.”

“Fortunate for Philip.”

“I’d better assist the young man to the house, and give the wound a little better attention than I had the facilities for doing in the road.”

Philip Shredds had lived in the home and worked on the farm since he was little more than a child. In a sense he was treated as a member of the family. He was at that time in his early twenties, uneducated beyond the ability to read and write and solve a simple problem in addition or subtraction. He was smooth-faced; that is, on Sundays, when he was shaven. He had a shambling gait, which may have been due partly to the style of shoes that he wore. He was warm-hearted and weak-headed. Poor Philip! Kind Philip!

When the surgical duties were at an end that afternoon, it seemed expected by the family who had gathered around that I take charge of the surgeon. So I invited the gentleman to the veranda, and asked him to be seated. But Father followed in a few minutes, and the conversation was supported by the two men, chiefly

by Father. For when Dad took a notion to talk there was small need for any one else to try. Nor did a person often wish to do more than listen. Daddy was interesting; so I thought. He knew a lot and told it with a zest that bespoke his backbone. Nobody ever accused *him* of having a cotton string for *his* backbone. What he believed, he believed, and you were made pretty sure of it. He talked to the doctor that afternoon, for he was grateful and pleased at the behavior of the gentleman. So I didn't get a chance to say much more than to ask the visitor if he would have water when I passed it. For the most part I sat mute, on a bench behind the vines, until the doctor left. From the same point, I watched him go down the walk—a tall man. When he turned to latch the gate, I could see his face. It was a strong face—intelligent; but I had seen handsomer faces. Now he was the chap of course that Emmy proposed bringing to call on me in state. I wondered if he would be back to look after the patient.

I suppose I had just as well tell it now as at any time. He did come back to see the patient, and he and Father had another long talk, and he left me out of the ring again. What do you think of that? Still, I didn't hang round where I feared he would think I was trying to get a word with him. He even dropped down in the living-room one day where he had a talk with Mother. In fact, he had pretty good reason to feel very much at home there, and I believe he did so, for all the family were wild about him. I said all the family, but of course

I couldn't be included. I wondered if Emmy ever would bring him to call properly. He never did. He said afterwards that he didn't see any use when a fellow could introduce himself the way Grover Folk could. Well, it was funny. Doctor Folk got to riding around with Father; Father was showing him the country. He could have walked off with the place, or very nearly have done so, without any one's raising an objection. It was a new sensation—that of my being wholly ignored. To tell the whole truth, I was a trifle indignant. One afternoon I was sitting on the hillside of the lawn with a book on my lap, reading. I liked to read, and read a good deal in those days. I looked up and saw the figure of a man coming along the pike. I watched to see if it were *he*. Yes; that's just who it was. I decided I wouldn't run, nor would I take any notice of him. I would go on with my reading just the same as if he were not around. Why shouldn't I? So I pinned my eyes to the book, figuratively speaking, and became thereby irresponsible for the young man's having to stand a good while, waiting to see if I would speak to him. But I felt the presence of a person near, and so I lifted my eyes, and there he was.

"Your book must be interesting," he remarked.

"Oh! very," I answered with a toss of my head.

"What are you reading?"

I hesitated a minute, and then I answered in a polite, apologetic tone of voice:

“None of your business.”

“Ah! I beg pardon.”

Then he removed his hat and ran his fingers through his hair, which was brown and a little long, and laughed a good-natured, lazy laugh. Afterwards he sat down beside me, and pretty soon took my book and turned the leaves and held it the rest of the time in his hands. He spoke of books, with which he seemed to have an intimate acquaintance, and drew me out to talk of various matters. I said nothing that was in any way worth repeating for its wisdom, as any one would know. I just had a good time. Must I confess it? At length the visitor handed me the book, remarking he had come to say goodbye to the household, as he would return to the city on the morrow. He rose and waited, as though he expected me to rise also; but I didn't. I said:

“You will doubtless find Mother in the living-room, and she can tell you about Father and the others.”

He laughed a little, and made the request:

“You will not run away till I come back, will you? Please.”

The truth of it was I didn't want to run away if I could keep friends with myself and stay. I didn't do any reading in the meantime, but doubtless I appeared rooted to the spot. A little later the gentleman returned, but he made no signs of sitting down again, and I gave him no invitation to do so. I rose quite promptly and said:

“So you think of leaving tomorrow? You

certainly have done a good turn to Philip since you have been here."

"He is all right now."

"Scarcely expected to put your profession into practice while you were on your visit, did you?"

"Glad I happened along. Besides it's given me such pleasure to know your family. One seldom meets a strong character like your father, or a sweet woman like your mother. You ought to be—say, I want to know why we haven't got better acquainted?"

"Probably you haven't thought of it."

"That's the truth. Hope we may meet again some day," he added hurriedly, and thrust out his hand.

He went on his way, and I turned and walked slowly to the house.

"Consarn it!" I said to myself, though I didn't mean to let it get out that I said such a thing. "That man captures me. No, he doesn't. I am mad. The idea of his not thinking of trying to get acquainted with me! Well, he doesn't know how much I like him. I didn't let that out. Nobody knows. Thank goodness!"

The days went by. That fall I visited a school friend in a town some fifty miles away. I apologize for talking so much about myself, when I know it's bad manners, and when I also know about more interesting people, but I do so, I suppose, because I am interested in myself and in the tricks that life has played me. To go on then, provided I am pardoned for doing so, I would mention that I met a dapper young blade

of that town. It is of no use to speak of all the people I met. It's enough to hang to the ones who served in the molding of my destiny.

The young gentleman belonged to one of the first families of the place; indeed, to a prominent family of the state. He was an only child. His father was a politician. He wore good clothes, had easy manners, and was popular in the society of the town. He went with me to a few parties, and, in fact, came to monopolize my time. He didn't seem to have much business, if any, to attend to, though I didn't think of that then. We girls could always depend on him to go with us to places. When the time came for me to return home, the young man boarded the train and went with me—went all the way. I wondered what Mother would think when she saw me bringing a gentleman back with me. Still we were used to young men at our house; they didn't frighten any one. Rufus Dale was the name of that beau. He was fair-haired, though he kept his hair cropped so close to his head that the skin became a rival for prominence. He had regular features, which might have produced a pleasing countenance if it all had not been spoiled by a wart on his nose. It was a shame that a wart, a small thing like a wart, could hinder the love of a maiden for a man who called upon all the powers there were to attest to the height and depth of his affection for her. At least, I told myself it was the wart. I didn't know what else it could be.

IV

Big Sugar Lump made up her mind that we were going to have a wedding. I did not think of it that way then, but the truth of the situation came to me afterwards when I had had more experience in the world. She thought she had good reasons for deciding to have the wedding. She said I had been running around long enough, and it was time for me to get settled. When I had a good chance I ought to take it and be done with it. There was young Dale coming all that way to see me and writing to me every day. Where was I going to do better? He was only a young fellow himself, but his father was a prominent man. I would be making a good match—one that my family would be proud of. I ought to know it. Sometimes Big Sugar Lump made me feel that I had much to learn. That idea was enforced then when I complained:

“But I do not love him.”

“You will learn to love him, you little goosey,” declared Big Sugar Lump.

“Suppose I shouldn’t?”

“Well, dear, all people do not regard love as essential to marriage. If persons are fairly congenial and circumstances suit, that is all many ask. One cannot have everything at once on this mundane sphere; you ought to learn

that. I wouldn't see you unhappy for anything, but I don't believe you will be if you marry Rufus Dale."

So I listened to one argument and then another from her until I began to think I would marry. For, as I looked at it, I could see that love was not the only consideration. Take Emmy for instance. He said he loved me, but he wasn't able yet to support me. I reviewed the situation as much as my little head was capable of doing. I sat up in my room one night, trying to think things over and arrive at a decision, when I heard Philip come through the yard gate, whistling. As he passed around the house, I thrust my head out of the window, and called:

"Any mail, Philip? Any letters for me, I mean?"

Philip had been to the village, and at the post office, and was then getting back.

"A letter for you," he answered.

"Wait."

I procured a long string, tied a small weight to it. Holding the other end in my hand, I dropped the weight to the ground.

"Tie my letter on this string, Philip," I ordered.

Philip laughed and obeyed. I drew up the letter, and of course read it. It was from Rufus Dale. I might as well tell that he was urging me to marry him, and his letter coming at that particular time decided me to accept the offer. On the next day I was plucking pansies from a bed in the garden when Philip entered with a hoe. He passed me on his way to the work

which he had come in to do, and then stopped a minute and inquired:

“Was your letter from the doctor?” You don’t mind my asking, do you?”

“Well, no, Philip; but it wasn’t from the doctor.”

“Don’t he ever write?”

“Doctor Folk, you mean? *Your* doctor? Why should he be writing to me?”

“Why shouldn’t he? Don’t everybody write to you? He ought to, too. I wisht he would. I would go after *his* letters every night.”

“Well, you won’t have to go for them.”

I plucked pansies a little faster, perhaps.

“Say, Stella, you ought to marry him. He’s the best one that’s been around.”

“Because he sewed up your head you needn’t think he dropped any extra brains into it. Go along to your hoeing, Philip; in offering me advice you are undertaking more than is necessary.”

“But now and then Philip knows a thing or two. You had better listen to him. You may be sorry for it some day if you don’t.”

“Philip, go on to your work. I’ll look after my own affairs, if you please.”

Philip moved away slowly, saying:

“Well, you won’t listen to me; but you ought to take *him*.”

Very soon preparations for the wedding began. It was decided that I should have a wedding befitting the daughter of the home. Big Sugar Lump was in her glory. She enjoyed bustle and excitement anyhow. Now when a

wedding was the occasion, oh, my! The big cousin had good taste in such matters as were under consideration, and Mother deferred to her.

As for Mother, I think she sighed over it all a little, and then smiled and put the best foot foremost.

“The time comes into the life of every woman,” she would say, “or of most women, at any rate. So it’s come to our little girl. Natural and right, of course.”

Father went about talking little. As far as I could judge, there was something to which he could not become reconciled. I began to believe that he disliked the young man, for which I secretly respected him the more. He would not say anything, however, thinking that I had made my choice.

I was in several different frames of mind myself, sometimes singly and sometimes all at once. I sat up at night, wondering if I would marry that man. Circumstances were fast closing in on me. I had read somewhere of circumstances closing in on a character. I thought of the story, and decided that the author must have had a view of life from the same angle that I had. Sometimes I cried out, “Is there no escape for me?” Again I would say, “Grover, Grover Folk, you could rescue Philip—but you wouldn’t turn your hand over for me.”

Again I wondered what poverty with Emmy would be like. If it would be very bad. In spite of the preparations, I was not sure what I was going to do. I did not want to act in any

way that would bring either disgrace or sorrow to the family. Yet I did not know just what I would do. I inquired of inanimate things about the place that I loved if it were not wicked to marry without love, and what I was to do. So the weeks passed. Preparations for the wedding went on. Letters from my fiance poured in upon me. Finally presents began to arrive. Something would *have* to happen. I couldn't marry that man. I just couldn't! More than once Big Sugar Lump said to me:

"Don't frown that way, dear. A bride ought to look cheerful and happy."

"Big Sugar Lump, you are asking me to be a regular, downright hypocrite; that's what you are doing."

"You are not troubling over love, are you?" she would inquire in tones of surprise.

"How can I help it?"

"Now don't, dear. You must be happy on your wedding day. What a beautiful wedding it will be, so appropriate for the ending of your girlhood days. A credit, too, to your family, showing their wishes for your having the best of everything. A girl should be happy to have a wedding like yours whether there is any bridegroom at all or not. Ha, ha! Cheer up, now, dear. We don't want you looking like that. Well! I have enjoyed the preparations."

"You have worked pretty hard for your fun," I said, with something like a smile.

"Oh, I don't mind work, you know. I don't see how I ever come to grow so fat when I have hardly been idle a minute in my life. You have

had a beautiful girlhood, dear, and now you are going to have a beautiful wedding, and you must look your own beautiful self. Now I must go. I hear your mother calling. There is a cake in the stove."

We were in my room at that time. As the door banged after my cousin, I thought: "I'll be the only thing at the wedding to spoil it." A sigh escaped me. But I did nothing positively disgraceful until the morning of the eventful day. Then I looked up Philip and asked him to saddle my horse.

Philip showed surprise. After a little, he said:

"What is it? Let me do it for you."

"I must do the thing myself, Philip. Saddle my horse and bring him around to the stile."

I hurried back to the house and put on my riding-habit. When I saw Philip leading the horse from the barn I slipped out of the house, trying to attract no attention. Philip's face was a study as he held the horse for me, but he did not speak a word. I rode down the pike until I came near the Humphry home. There I stopped, for Emmy was building a fence near the road. I was glad I did not have to go to the house and ask for him. But I had not thought where I would find him. I just had to see him; that was all. I drew up the bridle and stopped.

Emmy showed awkwardness in lifting his great straw hat. His cheeks were flushed from the exercise in which he had been engaged. A fringe of his dark hair could be seen under his

hat brim. His brown eyes looked on me tenderly. His head came well above the finished piece of stone fence at which he had been working. My old friend leaned against the same stone wall and thrust his inquiry at me by means of his facial expression. I felt my cheeks burning. But there I was and I must speak. At last I found the courage to say, "Emmy!" Then I broke into crying. I was ashamed of having come. Then Emmy asked:

"What is it? Don't cry. Don't cry. Tell me what it is. If I can help you in any way, you know I'll do it. I don't know what I am going to do anyhow after you are married. I am afraid I'll not be able to keep on here with the farm."

"Emmy, you say you are not ready to marry?"

He looked surprised at the question, and waited for me to speak further.

"The truth is," I continued, "I don't believe it's possible for me to marry Rufus Dale. You see how near the time is for the wedding. Tonight! I came to ask you what I must do."

Now that wasn't what I had come for at all; but I fibbed around until I let Emmy know what I *had* actually come for.

"Why, I don't see but one thing for you to do now," Emmy answered, "and that's to go on and make the best of it. I wish I had been born rich, and then I could offer you what you ought to have, and maybe things would have been different."

"Do you think poverty would be so very bad?"

"Oh, my land, yes! I wouldn't have my wife live on what I am able to give her for anything. Besides, the extra expense would hinder me from getting a start in the world. Got to use your sense about marrying as well as about other matters."

"Emmy, you'll be a man that we'll all be proud of some day. You ought *not* to be hindered."

"I am not going to be. Don't you worry."

"Would I hinder very much," I asked, "if I'd live on bread and water?"

"Do you really mean what you imply?"

"Every *bit* of it. I can't marry that man. I don't know what to do."

Emmy hesitated for a minute, and then he said:

"All right, then. Love goes ahead of business."

Suddenly I declared:

"It doesn't either. It would not be good sense in your eyes. Goodbye. Be sure to come to the wedding."

I turned my horse's head toward home.

"Hold on, Stella," I heard.

Emmy climbed over the fence, and stood by my horse.

"Stella, you make me miserable," he said. "I intend to be there tonight, for that matter. If you should change your mind again—at the last minute—and want me, why, all right."

"Thank you. Goodbye."

V

My husband took me to live with his parents. The house looked big enough and I made no objection. For somehow I felt like seaweed subjected to the lashing of the waves around me, from which there was no escape. However, I began by and by to think of a change in the manner of receiving what came my way. I found that passing through a lot of mental agony, because I was not pleased, was injuring my health and rendering me a generally undesirable specimen of humanity. So I determined upon some self-reform. But I did not come to that decision until after the birth of my baby. How much I regretted that I had not! For I believe that I might have done a good deal toward preventing the invalidism of my child if I had done so. The effect of my mental attitude; at least, that was my idea. Yet I found a grain of comfort in recalling the fact that circumstances beyond my control had much to do with my marriage. I must, even at that late day, get hold of my life by some handle or other. There was another life now dependent upon me.

The appeal of a child awakened within me numberless unknown possibilities of my nature. It gave me a kind of strength for handling matters that affected me—a feeling that I must

do so for baby's sake at least. The clinging of those tiny fingers to mine caused me to stick to my own opinions about a thing, if I had any. If I had none, I set to work to form them. I had often heard of the marvelous feats of mother-love, for the child, but I had failed to hear much of what it did for the mother herself. I found there was something to say about that. For I determined to rise above the lash of the waves, and, instead of being beaten about by the tides, I would master my own destiny. It was not an easy job that I set for myself. Still I shall not anticipate. My chief concern came to be for my child. So the effect of a certain conversation with my husband's father was not surprising.

One day, as I sat in the broad hall with Baby in my arms, Judge Dale came out of the library and stood near the doorway, looking on, while he finished with his gloves. He did not often show me attention, and so I wondered a little what was behind that. The judge was a large man, with heavy, shaggy brows and deep-set eyes. He carried with him the atmosphere of having just come from His Satanic Majesty. I always felt the need of a breath of pure, fresh air after he passed. I'd as soon he would have gone on that time as to stand there looking at me, so I could have the quicker got over my fit. He asked me how Baby was coming on, making several impertinent inquiries regarding her deformity. Then he delivered his mind.

"It would be better if the child were dead," he said. "In such cases it's but the essence

of humanity to let the subject die in infancy.”

I gasped. I felt as if I might fall out of my chair.

“You will waste your time and your strength on that child, with absolutely nothing to gain, except the chance of prolonging a life for misery.”

I opened my mouth to speak, but the words froze.

“It should have died with its first breath. It will never be able to walk.”

“Sir, you are speaking to the mother,” I found the strength at last to say.

“I am its grandfather. I foresee doctors’ bills, all to no purpose.”

After having thus delivered himself, he left. I felt that I must get back to my own room, for there I was a little more secure from unpleasant encounters. It was there where I spent most of my time. The room was large. In fact, it was so large that the furniture looked as if it were making a failure of its duty.

“Ugh!” I spoke aloud on that occasion. “A nice grandfather he is. If he were different how much it would mean to us.”

After a little a tap sounded on the door, and a harsh feminine voice spoke about the same time.

“I haven’t seen the baby this morning. I thought I would come in.”

During the visit the question was asked:

“You haven’t decided on a name yet, have you?”

“Oh, yes!” I answered. “Grace.”

“Grace?” my mother-in-law answered.

“Grace?” my mother-in-law repeated.

That was all she said for a few moments, then she added:

“Why didn’t you choose some more appropriate name? People will criticise her for bearing the name of Grace, if she lives to be any size.”

“I am naming her according to the way I see her myself. In a sense she is perfect in my eyes. Love makes her so.”

“Oh, ah!”

The small woman before me merely looked at me, and, by and by, spoke of the weather. I doubted not her having undergone a long course of training in agreeing with people. At least, she must have learned that lesson of yielding in the end. Otherwise, how could she have lived in peace with the husband that she had? I had no way of knowing what the cost to herself had been. It may have been much, or it may have been little. I could not tell. Her personality seemed to be negative. I often thought it would be a treat to find out something that she liked very much, or something that she strongly disliked. I was in hopes that she would express herself further in regard to the name of the baby. She did not, however, then, and ever afterwards accepted “Grace” without question. By ever afterwards, I mean as long as there was opportunity for Mother Dale and me to talk together.

For that very day my husband made it clear to me that a change was impending; not so

much by what he said, but by some things that he did not say. I was in my room when he entered. He tossed his hat on a chair, and gave no sign for a time of his knowledge of my presence. I knew that something was wrong. I waited for a seasonable moment to speak. It did not seem to come, but finally I spoke anyhow.

“Isn’t it a delightful day?” I remarked with warmth of tone. That old, friendly topic could not offend any one, I thought, and it might serve as a stepping-stone to something else.

“Is it?” my husband asked indifferently. “I have had other things to think about.”

“What, if you please?”

“Something more than the weather and the kid.”

My husband never talked to me about business, except, perhaps, about a side issue now and then. He stayed in an office of his father, but what he did in there was more than I knew. I came to suspect that he did next to nothing, and that we were supported by Judge Dale. So I could understand why it was doubly disappointing to Rufus for his father to fail being elected to the state office for which he was then a candidate, if defeat seemed probable.

“I am sorry if something has disturbed you,” I remarked. For I tried to be agreeable to Rufus, and to forget as far as possible about the wart on his nose, especially since Baby came.

“You may be sorry, sure enough,” my hus-

band averred. "How's the kid? It's a kid for you, now isn't it? Deformed!"

"Aren't you ashamed to slur at the poor little thing? It's my dear baby, anyway."

Rufus was not always ill-natured. Something had gone wrong, or he was afraid that an especial something would go wrong. The most disturbing thing to him that I could think of was his father's defeat in the election. There was no knowing how much money was spent in making the race. Nor was there any telling what change was just ahead of—even me.

VI

Judge Hale was not elected. Besides, the race for the office left him heavily in debt. The first thing I knew Rufus applied to Father for money. He was only an instrument in the hands of the judge, I was sure. The next thing I knew Father had lent the money. I wondered if it would ever be paid back, or if Father's hard-earned money would simply go to pay dishonest debts of Judge Dale. I had no doubt of their being largely dishonest ones. For, in the case of the debtor's being Rufus, Father would be lenient in regaining his means. The battle was one waged above my head. I was not consulted in the matter by any one. However, the more I thought of it, the more I believed I had a right to take a hand in it.

By and by I bundled up Baby and went home on a visit. While I was there I followed Father out on the lawn one day to have a talk with him. I admitted my ignorance of business, but I knew something about a game, I told him. I perceived there was a game going on around me that ought to be stopped. Well, Father and I had a long talk, in which Father gave me to understand that I was still his dear little girl, and that he was concerned about my interests. Several days later I was wandering around and I saw Father coming out of the thirty-acre field,

as he always called a certain tract. I went to meet him. He looked serious though he smiled when I said, "Hello, Daddy," in much the old way.

"You seem to have stumps in plenty in that field," I remarked. "More than there used to be, it seems to me. Not trying to sprout stumps for market, are you?"

Then I laughed a little.

Father paid no attention to my foolishness, but as we walked towards the house he said:

"Stella, I don't want you ever to sell that field; when I am gone, I mean.

I was startled.

"When you are gone?" I repeated. "Why, Father!"

"Hang to it like grim death," he pursued.

"If you say so."

"I do say so! Decidedly!"

As we walked on—Father a little in front of me—I felt as if I might have received an electric shock. It was an odd notion of his to emphasize that old stump field out of all his good farm and say a thing like that to me. Father had his eccentricities, so people said. Probably he was manifesting some of them in that instance. Anyhow, I was stirred to the depths of my being. Father was thinner than I had ever seen him. Perhaps he thought he would not live long.

During that visit I received a letter from Rufus, saying that Judge Dale was about to sell his home. Another letter came, telling that the house was sold and possession would be given

at once. Judge and Mrs. Dale expected to go to another town to live. He, Rufus, had rented a cottage, which he and I would occupy.

Oh, my! I had never kept house. So much seemed to be happening that affected me. I cut my visit short and returned to B-ville. Rufus met me at the train and took me to our new home.

The cottage was on the edge of the town. I looked upon it as a tombstone to all my worldly aspirations. For the elite would never call at a place like that. What did my husband mean? Had he lost his sense of the fitness of things to take me to live in a dwelling which was only a little better than a cabin? I was indignant when I was sat down before that poor, lonesome, paintless house. Hadn't I always been used to the best? My husband knew it.

Then came the bare, ugly rooms. I proposed papering and painting, but my husband shook his head. Said he knew the landlord would object. I had lost sight of the fact that I had a landlord; we didn't even own the place. I ended by placing all my furniture in three rooms, and making those rooms as desirable as possible. I had enough pretty things to make the parlor attractive, after a style. Should any of my friends wish to continue their acquaintance with me, they would find, when they were once inside the house, that they would be almost able to forget that I had undergone a change of fortune. I wish to say right here, to the credit of humanity, a few of my friends kept up their acquaintance with me. A very few showed even

warmer feelings toward me than they had shown in the past.

As for myself, I felt it all keenly, of course. How could I do otherwise? But in my struggles something within me told me that I was greater than poverty. I began to dream of ways to conquer it. With my many little make-shifts I gained in self-confidence and in ability, so I thought. As dark as the situation looked at times, I could not give up to it for the sake of my child. I don't know what I might have done without her. As it was, I worked on. I was still too young to lose all lightness of heart easily. So I often sang to the music of the washboard and to other accompanists fully as homely. There was one thing which I would not do, and that was to complain to Father and Mother. If I had come into possession of my lot in life, I meant to stand it somehow or other. After all, it was growing to be interesting to see what different worlds were like. There was even something in favor of looking up from the lower round, for a time at least. I saw a good many things that I did not discover when I stood on the top round and looked down. I came to think that the trials of it depended much upon the way I regarded my point of view. I had within myself the power to create a point of view. For many unseemly places there were compensations. I learned to look for the compensations, and often found them.

Still, there were some places which were hard for me to get by, try as I would. For instance,

the money that Rufus borrowed from Father went as I suspected it would go. There was no way of paying it back that I could see. Then, by and by (I can scarcely speak of this, yet), a horse ran away when Father and Mother were driving to town one day, and they both were—killed. Shock! Oh! But then they didn't suffer, it seemed. The deed was done instantly. Besides, they went to a brighter, happier world where they would not worry about me. Wasn't it lovely that they wouldn't? For them to worry about me was always more than I could stand. Oh, gracious! how I apologize for dragging in my troubles. It shows that a person never knows at the outset over what stones his road may lead. Yet, take my word for it, if he will look for his guiding star, he will find it. Without that light I should have been utterly bewildered. Sometimes it shone in one part of my firmament and sometimes in another.

To continue with the bad things that I hate to tell, my husband set about winding up Father's affairs. He took Judge Dale into counsel—never me, except in regard to matters of minor importance. Without previous notice I was told to sign a paper, deeding the farm to a recent purchaser. I staggered. Father's farm! I wouldn't. My husband raved. He would force me to do so. He couldn't. I wouldn't sign the deed. At last when he saw there was no use either to storm at me, or to argue with me, he quietly told me that he was obliged to have some money, or both he and Judge Dale would have to go to prison.

“To prison?”

There was my child. Both father and grandfather in prison. That would never do. The disgrace! Where was the deed? Then I remembered my promise to Father to hold the thirty-acre field, come what might. I would drop dead in my tracks before I would break that promise. It was as sacred to me as anything could be. I agreed then to sell all except that field.

“Utter nonsense!” my husband declared. “Who ever heard of breaking up a tract of land like that for the sake of one field. Perhaps the buyer would not want it without the field.”

“All right, then,” I answered. “It will go that way, or not go at all. You won’t let the father and the grandfather of little Gracie bear the disgrace of imprisonment, will you? You can probably find some one who will buy the farm without the thirty-acre field.”

“For the sake of the kid?”

“Why not for the sake of Gracie?”

My husband left me with a sneer on his face. I had tried hard to keep him from reading some things that were on my heart, but now and then I believed he got an inkling of the truth. If he had acted in a way to make me forget the wart on his nose, or what it stood for to me, I’d have been glad to forget it. Glad! If he had been aided by circumstances to make me forget, perhaps he would have come nearer succeeding. Circumstances, however, did her poorest, it seemed to me. Oh, well, such matters were not under particular consideration at

that time. Doubtless Rufus forgot the intimation just made as soon as he was gone. Anyhow, he brought me a deed to sign with the thirty-acre field left out.

VII

So Gracie's father and grandfather were saved from prison. Honestly, it was too big a price to pay for them, but it was not really for them; it was for Gracie. Prison was what the two men deserved, I did not doubt. The older man for his out-and-out wickedness, and the younger through weak obedience to his leader. Rufus alone would not have been guilty of anything that required so much energy and ability. It was perhaps too much to ask of a man to remain as he was in disposition before he married, when the odds were against him, but it was a simple fact that Rufus as my husband was very different from Rufus as my lover. The first Rufus was at least agreeable. The second Rufus was ill-natured; and, in addition, showed general inability for coping with the world.

Now that the money that should have made me and my child comfortable had gone to prevent a stain on the family name, had I not a right to expect some return for the sacrifice? I got it. Listen. At an early opportunity I put a few straightforward questions to Rufus concerning our affairs. As for the farm, I was assured that matter was all settled. Furthermore, Judge Dale would retire to private life. He had sufficient means laid by, it seemed, to

keep him comfortable in his old age. Nothing from that quarter about helping me. Rufus seized the chance to say:

“Rent on the house is overdue, and there is nothing to pay it with. My job will end this week, and I have already overdrawn my salary.”

That's what there was for me from that source. I alone knew how I had scrimped to get along. The end of a road was reached; that was all. There was nothing left then even to economize on. That night as I lay awake, trying to think what to do, I heard Rufus get up. A little later I saw him, by the moonlight that streamed through the window, open a suitcase and fill it. I didn't know whether he knew what he was putting into it or not. My heart stood still, it seemed, from surprise and I did not know what all. Plainly Rufus was going to leave. I did not speak. I did not know what to say. I looked and listened. Then I made a noise to let Rufus know that I was awake. He closed the suitcase quietly. Then he hesitated. Finally, he bent over the bed of Gracie, and stooped and kissed her forehead. Afterwards he turned towards me.

“Goodbye,” I said coolly. “When do you think you will be back?”

“Heaven only knows,” he answered in a tone that made my heart ache for him.

“Where are you going, Rufus?”

“I can answer that better when I get back.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I will tell you that when I get back.”

“What am I going to do while you are gone?”

“Exactly as you please.”

“Thank you.”

“Goodbye, Stella.”

“Goodbye, Rufus.”

That was the way my husband and I parted. Afterwards, as I lay there that night thinking I told myself that Rufus wasn't all bad. He had simply got caught in a wheel of circumstances that proved too much for his ability. Yet he had left plenty for me to do. There was no denying that. So I closed my eyes and tried to sleep as a means of preparation. Sleep at length kindly claimed me. Believe me, my emotions were alive, but I had sense enough to know that I was facing a situation which required all the brains I had. I had been tired that night when I went to bed from the day's housework, and I knew I needed the rest that sleep alone could bring. Perhaps I had gained a little in self-control of late years. It would have been strange if I hadn't undergone some changes, either for better or worse.

When morning came, then, I tried to decide what to do. Finally, I went to see my landlord and had a talk with him. I offered him all that was in the house, except wearing apparel, to offset the rent. The offer included my wedding presents. The value of them alone far exceeded the rent. What could I do with them? I had no place to keep them, and I wouldn't peddle them out.

The landlord was kind. He looked, and spoke, truly sympathetic. Say what one will about the coldness and hardness of the world,

when distress makes a recognizable appeal, there is oftener than otherwise a hearty response. The help that came from that man's sympathy was worth much to me in courage. Besides, he generously offered to buy what I had at a fair price. So, even after the rent was paid, I should have what seemed to me a considerable amount of money.

I grew anxious to leave B—ville before the town should learn about me. So I decided to go at once to a distant city where I would never see any one whom I had seen before, and there live out my days. Traveling so far seemed, though, a reckless expenditure of my means. However, I got together Gracie's clothing and my own, and soon set out.

Grace was then six years old. She was smaller than the average child of that age. Her little face was pale and pinched-looking. Her feet were still useless to her for walking. She had learned to roll herself a short distance in her wheeled chair. She was good at nursing herself—resourceful. I had been thankful many a time that that fact was true. Otherwise I did not see how I could have got along. The child was affectionate and cheery. She did not miss the use of her feet, as she had never had it; but I missed it for her. She was excited over our trip. She could remember having ridden on the train but a few times.

One morning soon I helped my little girl to her wheeled chair and placed two or three packages in there beside her. And we were ready to go. The trunk I had already sent to the depot. The trunk and the packages and the

clothes that Gracie and I wore, with what money I had in my purse, constituted the sum of all that I possessed. I had scarcely thought what I would do when I reached the city. I had only made up my mind to go, and had been busy in getting off. On the train I fell to wondering what I should do when I got there.

I knew next to nothing of life in a large city. However I had visited cities before on pleasure trips and shopping expeditions, and had seen them from the street cars and from the aisles of the large shops, from hotels and from some other public places frequented by visitors. Still, that way of seeing a city differed widely from seeing it as an actual member of its seething mass; I held a theory to that effect. There was the actual living in a city yet before me. I knew I was ignorant and the best I could think of was to trust to my guiding star, which had always manifested itself in the past, at last opening up to me. Doubtless it would not fail me that time.

At the end of the journey I lingered in the railway station to give Grace a bite to eat, and take a little food myself. There was still some in the box with which I had started. While I sat there, looking around, a pleasant-faced woman in a white cap spoke to me, making inquiries about the comfort of Grace. In the course of the conversation she asked me what I intended to do. Then enough of my story leaked out for the woman, whose business it was to help the ignorant, to offer me advice. The result of it was that I readily found a room, an inexpensive one, near a Settlement Home, where afterwards

I left my child while I went to my day's work. At first, while I went in search of work.

The Home Mother showed an interest in Grace. Grace was delighted with the large number of children that played around her; some of whom played with her. She had known very few children in her life, being at the disadvantage she was in keeping up with them. Her mother had been her chief playmate, but her mother had had much to do besides play. So the aspect of the change was a desirable one for Grace. I was thankful. For I could get along some way, any way, if only I could be at ease about my child.

I did not look for work immediately. I did not know what to look for. I had never tried to do anything outside the house; but from the want columns in the newspapers work ought not to be hard to find. One evening I sat studying the advertisements for Help. Grace lay on the bed, though she was not asleep. I had given her her supper, but I had not eaten. I had put aside the newspaper to draw me a cup of tea. My little alcohol stove stood on the table near. A gas jet burned above the table. I struck a match to light the stove without rising from the small rocking-chair in which I sat. As I was in the act of dropping the burnt match into a tray, I heard a voice outside my door that sounded familiar. I stopped quickly. The match did not reach the tray. Would the sound be repeated? I knew that voice. I had treasured it in my memory. Still there might be another like it somewhere in the world. It

might be in that city. Some one else spoke—talked at length. I rose from my chair and stole across the room to listen at the door. Grace laughed at my tiptoeing. I reached the door in time to hear the first voice again, but I did not understand the words that were spoken. Directly the two people went down the stairs. I heard the front door close. I turned. My heart beat fast. The flame of the stove was running high. Could it be possible? “What fools we mortals be,” I repeated, as I dropped the burnt match into the tray.

VIII

I was anxious to learn something of the owner of that voice. I was anxious to know if it belonged to *him*, or if it represented some other person. I didn't know what I should do if it did belong to *him*, for I certainly did not want to see him. I had come to that far-away city to drop from the view of my old acquaintances. So, logically, none of them had any right to intrude their presence on me. I would live for Gracie; that's all there was for me. Yet I must find out about that voice. I wondered if *he* stayed in that house. I was already calling the voice *he*. How manage? I must see, but I must not be seen. I thought often of the voice the next day when I was applying for the places advertised. It appeared as if there were a good many people besides myself wanting work. Someway they seemed to beat me to the jobs. The next morning I listened to hear the voice again, but I did not hear it. I was disappointed. Still I merely wanted to know if that voice was really *his*.

A few evenings afterwards I was later in coming in than I had been before. I was tired, too. I had lifted Gracie from her chair to carry her upstairs, when the landlady called:

“Here, Mrs. Dale, a minute, please.”

So I reseated Gracie in her chair and told

her to be good; Mother would be back in a minute. I stepped into the room from which the landlady called, and there stood—the voice. I was sure it was, though he had grown stouter since that afternoon on the lawn, and he wore a little more beard and looked somewhat different. I must have acted the idiot, for the lady looked at me wild-eyed a minute before she said:

“Doctor Folk thinks we have a case of measles in the house. I thought you would like to know for the sake of your little girl.”

“Very kind of you to tell me,” I said, determining to take small notice of the doctor. “Fortunately my child has had measles. Still I shall take precaution.”

I had about finished with what there was to say, so I thought, when the doctor stepped forward, saying:

“I have the pleasure of meeting an old acquaintance, have I not? Formerly Miss Battle—Miss Stella Battle.”

He held my hand a trifle longer than was necessary.

“How glad I am to see you,” he pursued. “Staying here? You must tell me something about yourself and about your father and mother and Philip and the Humphrys. I never hear from them these days.”

I trembled. My lip quivered. My eyes filled. I did not dare trust myself to speak. I only clung to his hand.

“Mother,” wailed the child in the wheeled chair, “come on; I’m hungry.”

“I must see you some other time,” the doc-

tor declared, "and have a long talk with you."

He took my arm and went with me to the wheeled chair. There he spoke to Grace, and inquired of me the nature of her trouble. He took my hand again and was gone.

"Let me carry the little girl upstairs for you this time," urged my landlady.

I was afraid she had observed my agitation. Doubtless she had done so. After depositing Grace in the room, the woman turned to me, remarking:

"That's one splendid doctor. Every one who knows him thinks so. Everybody loves him. The young man with the measles must. He is an old acquaintance, it seems. That's how he come to get the doctor, for Doctor Folk is a surgeon, and keeps busy at the hospitals the most of the time. Anything I can do for you tonight, Mrs. Dale?"

"Nothing," I thanked her.

The woman left the room. She was large physically, kind-natured, and a gossip.

I supplied the wants of Gracie. Afterwards I indulged in the mood that came over me. I had no right to do so, I suppose. I should have been strong and put aside all thought of the only man I ever saw, who I believed could have given me my life as I should have liked to live it. I said *should have liked*, for that chance was past—the chance for that life—except there had been no chance! Now here he came along to remind me of what might have been, should have been, and couldn't have been. I was stirred to the depths of my soul. If my soul had been

a million fathoms deep, my emotions would have reached the bottom. I was sure I had lost life, as it were, by failing to get *him*. Dead sure of it! The night was going apace. I could hear the clocks around striking the hours. Sleep would not come. I did not care if it didn't. I was alive to the sublimity of the occasion. I was always sensitive to the grandeur in Nature—to sunsets, to the starry sky. Weren't there experiences of the soul that were sublime? I did not weep. I merely lived to the limits of my being. Probably the disappointments and trials that I had had strengthened my appreciation of the impossible happiness for me.

It may seem that I ought not mention my interest in that man, under the circumstances. Yet, like many underground streams, this current of my life came to the surface without aid except that supplied by conditions. I was unable to avoid its appearance. So, when it came of its own accord, I did not know how to deny it and be honest with myself. In facing the truth squarely, I gained the advantage of knowing the ground on which I stood, and therefore of regulating my course of action. For his sake, I would then see as little of him as possible. Doubtless his interest in me was the very slightest, but I had always heard of the power of—interest—to awaken interest, and I would none of that.

The very next evening, after Doctor Folk had finished with his patient, the kind gentleman (why didn't he forget about me, or be too busy to stop, or something else?) told the land-

lady to ask me if I could receive him. I had no plausible excuse, especially as the landlady offered to look after Grace while I went to the parlor.

The parlor was a tiny room, but it looked well enough. Indeed, it did credit to the unpretentious rooming-house. I opened the door and entered. The doctor was standing near a window, looking at a picture on the wall. The gas was lighted, for it was already early evening. The doctor turned and took both my hands in his and led me to a sofa.

“Now I want you to tell me all about yourself,” he said, “and about everybody.”

He was of a sympathetic nature, and I knew it, although it was the first time he had ever shown me any sympathy.

I wondered where to begin, and what to put in and what to leave out. Finally, I started off with the end of my story, thinking I would tell it backwards, what I told of it.

“I came here for business,” I said.

“Business?” he repeated. Then he stared at me, as though he would read in my face all that I did not intend to put into words.

“Your husband?” he said with an interrogation point after it.

“I do not know where Rufus is,” I answered. “Gone to seek his fortune, perhaps; but I do not know. I have heard nothing from him since he left.”

“Is it possible?”

Then I answered questions concerning my family. I said about as little as possible on the

subjects that affected me most, for I did not wish to awaken an undue amount of sympathy in my companion. Matters could not be mended. So I branched away from those distressing topics with the remark:

“You have come to be a distinguished surgeon, I am told.”

Doctor Folk blushed, from modesty I thought.

“I drive hard at it,” he admitted. “You have not told me all about yourself,” he added. “I have enough, however, to shock me and amaze me. Think of the reverses that can come! I am glad I have found you. You must not suffer for want of anything that I can do for you. You have had enough already.”

“Oh! thank you,” I answered with a mock laugh. “Any one who has gone through what I have gone through can stand the rest.”

“Now I am going to tell you something to prove to you that I have a right to help you. Prepare to be shocked. I don’t care if you are by this. Even get the poker—if you can find one—to reward me. I might have saved you; provided you would have let me. That is, I might have saved you from much that has fallen to you. I have heard about the man you married. It’s a shame! If I had it to do over—if I had that afternoon on the lawn again—I would set up against any rival. I have always regretted that I didn’t tell you on the spot that I had fallen in love with you that afternoon. However, the thing took me by surprise. I was on the eve of returning to the city, too, and there was hard work ahead of me,

and I had much to think of. Nevertheless I have always regretted that I let you pass me. I have never seen any other woman toward whom I have had that feeling. Of course I have missed you out of my own life—for what might have been.”

I lay back on the sofa and covered my face with my hands.

“How can you?” I said with deep feeling. “How dare you now?”

“Because I have fancied that I might have made you like me, and because I want to do all I can to rectify the mistake I made then. I *am* going to do it, in fact. Your parents are gone. Here you are in a strange city, without friends, alone, and with a purse much lighter than it once was. It’s my right; nay, my duty. Put it that way, if you wish.”

“No, it isn’t your duty. My husband is alive; at least, I believe he is.”

“He isn’t worth anything to you if he is. His carcass would be valuable for a post mortem.”

“Doctor Folk!”

“What is it you are trying to do?” he inquired.

“Business.”

“What kind of business?”

I tried to suppress the tears that mounted to my eyes, and succeeded very well.

“Just business,” I repeated.

“All right, if you don’t want to tell me; but I’ll not fail this time to keep up with you. When may I see you again?”

He rose to go.

“When I become a widow,” I answered.

“Ah!”

IX

The next day I determined to double my energies and find a job. I read of an art shop wanting some one to tint pictures for it. "Why not try that?" I thought. I wanted something genteel, if I could find it. I had painted a good many pictures when I was a girl, some of which my friends had praised warmly. It would be a good idea to turn my talents to dollars and cents now. I copied the address from the newspaper and called on the firm. The manager received me courteously, but questioned me closely concerning the work I had done, especially the work I had done for commercial purposes. I had never sold a dollar's worth in my life. So that part was readily told about. At length, however, the courteous manager appointed a day and an hour when I might return and paint a trial picture. As I should have to furnish the material for that purpose, I went to the shop where such could be bought, and selected what I thought I should need. I wanted the advantages in my favor, and therefore made a liberal allowance for my needs. What was left over could be used on future work. The bill amounted to three dollars and sixty-five cents. I wished it not so much. Still, if I were going to paint pictures for my living the material would not be wasted. When the appointed time came, I

returned to the art shop and set to work. I was nervous over the job. I realized I was not doing my best, by a long way. I lamented that fact to the manager when he came to see how I was getting on. The man was kind and encouraged me, or I believe I should never have finished.

"Don't attempt the sky," he requested in a pleasant tone of voice. "We put that in with an air-brush. Ever see one?"

I had never seen one.

"I wanted to get a line on your work," he continued.

Then I mentioned the number of pictures that I thought I might be able to do, letting the manager know the exact size of the salary to which I aspired. When I was leaving, I thanked the gentleman for the opportunity he offered me. He cleared his throat a little; at the sound of which I took alarm. He remarked:

"We have all the help at present that we need, but probably later trade will pick up and we will need another artist. I can write you if we should."

"To be sure."

I left my address, and returned to my lodgings, feeling that I had as good as secured a job. Several days passed, but I heard nothing from the manager of the art shop. So I began to feel that something might go wrong about the picture job, and I would be on the lookout for something else.

I applied to the Employment Bureaus, telling the secretaries about my expecting to paint pic-

tures, but while I waited I wanted to see what they had to offer.

“What do you do?” they asked.

“I scarcely know what to tell you,” I answered; “but I haven’t been idle to speak of. I have done ’most everything from painting pictures to hoeing the garden.”

The women said that clerical workers were their specialties. Could I typewrite, or do stenography, or bookkeeping? No, I had never done any of those things, and I was rather afraid to undertake them offhand. I said so.

They would smile. They were very pleasant and kind.

“It’s people who have had experience along those lines who are in demand,” one woman told me.

“Maybe I could be just a clerk,” I remarked, after thinking a little. “I write a plain hand.”

“What experience have you had in an office?” the lady asked.

“Oh! none, as far as that is concerned,” I said, “but everybody has to get a start some time, you know. I am no more stupid than the average.”

“I would be glad to help you,” the lady declared; “but my calls are for experienced persons, unless it is in the case of young girls. People are willing to train young girls, but mature persons must have experience—nearly always.”

“Experienced!”

How I learned to wish that word were not in the language! At every place I applied it was

invariably the same question, "Experienced?" I wondered how a person ever got started in business, for nobody I ever heard of was born with experience.

After learning that I must have something special to apply for, I commenced asking for a place that required good, hard sense and plain handwriting. I could give proof of the handwriting at least.

Every one was courteous, but nobody offered me a job. I walked the streets, from one place to another, until the bands of my skirts grew alarmingly large. The bills in my purse were decreasing constantly, in spite of the economy I practised. Odors from the restaurants I passed often tempted me to go in and get a good, square meal, but I did not yield. I only promised to reward myself when I secured a job. Nor was that the only way in which I was tempted to spend the money which was getting away from me all too fast as it was. The displays of clothing in the windows made me growl. I wanted some of those frocks for Grace, and other articles for myself. "Never mind! Just wait until I get my job," I said.

At length I decided to write to the man for whose inspection I had painted the picture. It was several weeks since my experience with him. So I wrote, reminding him of his order for the pictures. He answered politely, saying that he regretted that he could not give the order then, and he was also sorry that he did not know when he could give it. He advised me to accept another position and not wait on him.

Accept a position? The irony of circumstances! I was almost in despair. I thought of Doctor Folk and wondered about going to him and telling him of my failure. No; I didn't want to place myself under obligation. I would fight my own battles. Fight them; but how? I had the courage, but I did not have the knowledge. There I was! One evening I was returning from my weary search, when a well-known figure turned from a news-stand and joined me.

"How are things going with you?" the person inquired.

"I decline to answer," I said, indignation showing a trifle.

"Decline to answer a perfectly civil question? Now, that is a handsome way to act. I am having a stormy time myself. Obligated to put an advertisement in today's paper. Here 'tis; take it along and read it."

I laid hold of the paper that was thrust at me.

"Can't depend on these girls in the office. How they fool away their time. They are interested in everything except business. They must run out and get lunches. They must telephone to their beaux. The last thought they have is the work they are paid to do."

My companion talked while trying to light a cigar. I caught my breath. Did he really need office help? He was tired of trying girls. Under those circumstances, I might apply for the place and yet not offend my pride. I waited to hear more, but the next time he spoke, he said:

"Here is my street. A call. Glad I met you.

Always a pleasure. Don't forget that I am your friend. You have showed precious little acquaintance with the fact. Farewell. See you again."

"Oh, my! Why did I ever meet that man? Goodness! I hoped I would not see him again. I *would* love him—a little—and I couldn't help myself.

Just as soon as I had a chance that evening, I opened the newspaper and found the advertisement. It ran:

"Wanted: Woman to take charge of office. Experience not essential. Permanent. Good pay. Girls need not apply."

Initials and address were added. Perhaps I might be able to fill that position. Yet if I couldn't do the work, I was afraid that the doctor would hesitate to tell me, or would not tell me at all. How hard I would try! Should I go to him in the morning? Again, I wondered if it were possible that he put that advertisement in the paper for my benefit. There was no way of finding out. Grace interrupted my meditations with the remark:

"Mother, I want to walk. I wants to run and play."

"Oh, my precious darling, what put that into your head?"

"Just 'cause I does. I wants to play."

I looked at the child and saw her wipe at her eyes with her hand. Poor, precious dear!

"All the other chillun do," she said.

"I wish with all my heart, darling, that you could walk." I folded my newspaper with a

sigh. "Don't you have a good time at the Home while Mother is away?" I asked.

"Oh, Mother! I'm learning to read, and I can write my name."

The little thing smiled and clapped her hands.

"I know you can. The teacher has told me about how quickly you learn. Makes Mother happy for you to learn to read and write."

"I'll read my book for you."

"Not now. Go to sleep tonight. Some other time."

"Shall I apply at the office of Doctor Folk tomorrow?"

The question I put to myself in an undertone, almost perplexed to death.

X

The next morning I decided to spend one more day in search of a job. Then if I failed to get one I would call on Doctor Folk. I was obliged to have work. My money was almost gone. The position he advertised might be filled, but I would take the chance. So I set out early to a factory that was wanting "Female Help." I did not wish to work in a factory, but I would do so in consideration of a living.

The entrance to that factory was anything but inviting. The street in front was dirty. There were half-a-dozen dirty loafers on the pavement near the door. Several people waited in the lobby to interview the superintendent. They were not of my class. Now I was not high-minded in the sense of thinking myself better than my fellow beings, but those people were "factory people," and I wasn't. To be logical, then, I was the one who was out of place. I wanted a position, and I had gone there to try to get one, and so I meant to see the business through. When the superintendent appeared in the lobby, I was among the first to state my case. The man looked at me a minute without speaking, as if he were making an analysis of some foreign body that had got in his line of goods. He was not a scholarly

man. He had probably studied the books in his grammar school; that was all. Still I shall always respect his insight into character, even if I may not honor his veracity.

"No position open this morning," he said to me, in a manner that admitted of no further discussion of that subject, or of any other.

After the edge wore off my disappointment, I could not help being happy that I was not wanted there. As I waited for a car down the street, a woman came running to me, saying:

"You remember that pretty girl in the lobby, don't you? Well, after you left, the superintendent turned to her when she was leaving and told her not to go, that he had a job for *her*. Now, did you ever? Wanted that pretty girl around. It's a shame when you are so young-looking and pretty, too. That's always the way; the girls get the preference."

"Did you secure your job?" I inquired with interest. For I recognized the woman as one who waited with me in the lobby.

"Get it? Yes; I got it by lying. Plenty do that way. When that man asked me if I had ever run a power-machine, I told him, 'Yes.' Well, I haven't; but I mean to look around and get somebody to give me a few dots, and I'll get along. If I like it, I'll stay. If I don't, I won't. I never would have got it if I hadn't lied about that thing, *experience*, they are all so crazy about."

"My lies are never born with any backbone," I lamented. "They won't stand tests."

Besides, what's a liar going to do when she's through with this world?"

"Can't tell, I'm sure. One world at a time is bad enough for me. Isn't that your car? Goodbye. A shame that pretty girl took the job away from you when you are so young-looking yourself, and as pretty as a posy."

I actually thought of the river. In case Gracie should be left alone, the "Home" doubtless would adopt her. Well, it was still early in the morning, and I had other places yet on my list. I went next to a candy factory. The building was on the outskirts of the city, a large, handsome edifice of grey stone. The inside was commodious and up-to-date. "It's lovely in here," I thought. I applied for a position, and the employer inquired:

"What can you do?"

"Anything," I answered, "from wrapping the candy to stirring the kettle." I had small idea what kind of vessel was used in making candy in a place like that. It might have been that the suggestion of the woman at the other factory was affecting me. The employer said:

"I think they have all the help out there that is needed; but we do want another person in the office. Think you could help in an office?"

"Oh, my, yes! I write the plainest hand you ever saw and I've got the most common sense."

I was nearly desperate. I wanted a job so terribly.

The employer smiled, saying: "A rare gift. This place isn't hard to fill; it does not call

for stenography or typewriting either, but then the pay isn't large."

We had a talk about the pay, and I agreed to take the place, with apparent reluctance, but really I was as keen as a razor to get it. Showed the progress I had made according to the woman at the other factory, didn't it? So I laid aside my wraps and was introduced to the other office people with whom I would be associated, and then introduced to my own job. Thank goodness! I was glad to meet it, for I was worn threadbare in search of it.

I was merely an assistant of other assistants, and I felt a little chagrined; but I said nothing, of course. I worked on and tried to learn my routine. The foreman of the office was a little Italian, a certain Giuseppe Dolci. He complained of overwork and set me at some of his tasks. However, he found time to go from his desk at one side of the room to that of Mell Startlett at the other side about every half-hour, it seemed. He had a narrow face, a bald head and a dull eye. He showed an appreciation of his own wit that was wonderful to see, and expected every other person in the room to be able to enjoy it. Very soon I realized that I could not give the response expected. On such occasions I merely clung to my work, apparently obvious to all else, and let the wit get taken care of the best it might. Mell Startlett never failed to applaud at the right places.

Mell was a large woman, with heavy features and a bold tongue. It was hard to tell about the amount of delicacy with which she set out

with in life—whether she had a little to start with and lost it on her way to success in her work, or whether Nature denied her that attribute altogether in the beginning. It was sufficient for me to learn that she had none then. She shrieked her most private affairs from the housetop. Yet oftener than otherwise she drew attention to the moral she found. She spoke much of her lamentable need of good clothing, but it was easy to see that she had never learned the gentle art of economy in dress. In calling attention to her tatters, she would announce that her week's salary went as soon as it was received, and she had nothing to show for it except a bare living. That fact was easily accepted, and yet one wanted to tell her that a person with her income would do well to stick to the necessities and leave the luxuries, for the most part, alone. Giuseppe Dolci sympathized with Mell in her distresses. He failed to see wherein Mell should have managed better, either from his own wish to indulge her, or from the natural blindness of a man in such matters. It was difficult for me to tell which was the case, or whether his conduct was influenced by a mixture of the two elements. Anyhow, one day I saw him take a roll of bills from a drawer in his desk and hand it to Mell, and I heard her say in a pleased tone, "Oh, you have something for me, have you? You are a dear!" Unfortunately, it seemed, I looked in that direction at the wrong moment, and must have showed my surprise in my face, for as Giuseppe Dolci caught my eye his face red-

dened. I tucked my head back in my papers, but I knew instinctively something was going to happen, and that something to me.

At the lunch hour I would wander away by myself, and sit down in a spot where I could eat my lunch in quiet enjoyment. Once the forewoman from the candy-kitchen joined me. She was small and plump, and had the most enviable muscles I ever saw in a woman. These she had gained through her long service in the factory. She had a pleasant face and a kindly manner, but factory was written in every lineament; so strong were the marks of environment. The woman introduced me to the mysteries of the factory, and I began to feel grateful that I had found a friend. Still, as I went about the building, I sometimes wondered if I should have to be a factory woman the rest of my days. I sincerely hoped not. Perhaps my wheel of fortune would turn another peg and I would find myself more congenially situated. In the meantime, however, I was glad of my job.

One day after Mell had seen me talking with the forewoman, she stopped by my desk in the office, and said loud enough for the whole force to hear:

“I don’t have anything to do with Miss —— myself; nothing at all. If you only knew some of the tales that are told about her. Dreadful! I wouldn’t be seen with her for anything in the world. *I* wouldn’t, myself!”

Mell lost no occasion, in rudeness to the forewoman, to prove by her manner that she would have nothing to do with her.

“What sort of place have I got into?” I asked myself. “Yet I must work.” So I stuck closer than ever *to* my job, if that could be, and closer to myself. In spite of these facts, I received occasional reminders of the displeasure of Giuseppe Dolci. One afternoon, to bring an unpleasant tale to its finish, I was notified that my services were no longer required.

On my way home I cried; less perhaps from my need of the work than from my having been discharged. However, before I had gone far, I reflected that a good thing was as apt to rise from a disappointment as a bad one. Now that I had been able to get one job, perhaps I could get another, and a better one next time. While I was still in the suburbs of the city my attention was arrested by something familiar in the walk of a man whom I saw coming across a field. I had seen but one person shuffle exactly that way when he walked. Yet how came it to be he? Anyhow, I would wait to see. Sure enough, it was Philip Shredds.

XI

Philip occupied a house of two rooms; one room was set squarely above the other. The lower room accommodated odd bits of iron and of tin, old wagon-wheels, pieces of chains and other rubbish that Philip had gathered from various places about the city. In fact, the lower room was his store-room and the upper one his living-apartment. The ascent to the second story was made by means of a ladder. Once there one found a lounge in one corner, a stove in another, boxes in which were stored a large amount of canned goods, a few dishes, a basket, a lamp and some rags. It was several weeks after my meeting Philip that I paid him a visit. I had asked him the same question before, but I repeated it:

“How on earth did you happen to come 'way here?”

“I don't mind tellin' you, Stella,” he answered; “I wanted to go where nobody would know me. After the farm was sold it seemed like bad luck, bad luck, had it in for me. Lost some o' my money that yer paw had paid me. I was ashamed to stay on there where I would be looked down on, after livin' at yer house fer so long. I was pestered some that away. So one day I lit out without tellin' nobody where I was goin'. I knowed I wasn't a-goin' to the

dogs, as some made out they thought. Lived with decent people too long for that. I meant to hold up my head and git a business for myself. You know how it was; we didn't have much use on the farm for anybody that didn't have a business."

I wondered if the réverses had affected Philip mentally. He was not strong in that respect to start with. Yet he often surprised me with a bit of shrewdness. I had been thinking over his case since the afternoon I met him and he told me where he was living and something of his employment. So I determined to satisfy myself by a closer view of his proceedings, and then I wondered if I could manage in any way to take the poor, forlorn creature under my wing.

His appearance alone was enough to enlist my sympathy, and arouse indignation, too. The creature went about in roughly patched shirt and pajamas whose jagged edges struck him a little below the knees. His lower legs were bare to the tops of his shoes. His shoes were some that had been picked from a trash barrel. His hat was a wide-brimmed felt, with rolled edges and what looked like bullet holes through the crown. It also was a trophy of the trash barrel. His whiskers, from brown to a dirty white, were three or four inches in length and made a half-moon of his face. When the opportunity presented itself, I inquired:

"Philip, can't you dress any better?"

"Dress better, you say?" he answered.
"What's wrong? Bad business to live beyond

yer means. My business furnishes my clo'es straight out. I sell enough of the wares downstairs to buy some o' my eats—see them cans?—and, as fer the rest, well, I manage to stay on good terms with the garbage man."

"Philip, Philip!"

"Now, I don't eat bad stuff," spoke up Philip with a slight stammer. "The garbage man puts the good in a sack by itself. It's astonishin' how much good stuff folks throws away. It's pore management in them, o' course, but when a smart man comes to town an' kin git a livin', in part at least, from where they've fell down, why, it works out all right."

"My, my! to think he's come to that," I said under my breath. Then I asked:

"Philip, do you rent your house?"

"Well, no'm, Stella; I'm above livin' in rented property. How come you to think I could come to that after livin' at yer paw's fer as long as I did, and a'lookin' on that place as my home? No'm, I thank you! Philip saved enough money to buy himself a home. He owns a home like a gentleman. In spite of what people said he's not goin' to the dogs. He owns his own home and he's got a business that furnishes his livin'."

I rose from the chair in which I had been sitting. It was the only one in the room. Plainly, Philip did not expect to entertain visitors when he furnished his house. While I stood in the floor deciding what to say, and whether or not I had better go along about my own business, Philip asked me with concern:

“Where’re you livin’ at?”

“I’ve just been wondering if we couldn’t manage to live in the same house,” I said, avoiding a direct answer to the question. “I am thinking of moving into a large house where I shall have rooms to rent. There will be a good deal of work to do. You could help me and I would help you. You would like that better than your present business, wouldn’t you?”

Philip hesitated a minute before answering. When he spoke, he said:

“Well, Stella, it looks to me like it’s my duty to be the protector of you and yer little girl. There ain’t nobody else that I kin see. Yer husband made sech a fizzle, from what I’ve heerd. I never did like that match fer you no-how. I told you at the time you’d better marry the doctor, but you wouldn’t pay no ’tention to me. People are likely to get hard-headed about who they marry, I ’spose. Anyhow, the fence is done kicked down, and that lets you an’ the little girl out in the road. While it wasn’t no fault o’ mine when you wouldn’t take my advice, it ain’t becomin’ of me not to fergive you.”

“Well!” I answered hysterically. That was all I could think of to say.

“When a man gets a business,” Philip ran on, “he’d better stick to it. It’s his pervision ’gainst want. Mebbe though I could combine business and duty. I might help around your house and run my own business too. Now, that might be great, come to think on it. Follwin’ duty is an old thing, I ’spose—but this’s

hard to beat. When do you want me to come?"

"I don't know exactly. I haven't quite decided about the house. I'll let you know."

Very soon I descended the ladder and was off.

I had been looking for another job, and had failed to find anything very promising, though I had gained experience which enabled me to get something or other. The idea of taking a rooming-house came into my head and stayed there. It seemed a formidable undertaking. Perhaps I would not be equal to it. But I *had* gained a little in courage. Anyhow, I must not idle. I must do something. So, from the home of Philip, I went to look at rooming-houses. My search among them resulted in my finding a house that I thought would do. It was already fairly filled with roomers, and, on the whole, was the best proposition I had seen. I was in the act of deciding upon it while I was yet in the hall, when the front door opened, and in walked—my husband.

XII

I wondered if all the world had moved to that remote city because I came. Now as I was beginning to feel that I could make my way, though I still expected rough places in the road I had to travel, here came my husband. I did not think of the man who entered the rooming-house, while I was standing there talking to the real estate agent, as being any one I knew, and so I did not take a second look at him until he started up the steps. Then his back was toward me, and I did not know whether he recognized me or not. There he was, anyhow! If I took that rooming-house he would be *there*, spelt in still bigger letters. I noticed that his clothes were shabby. That sign was opposed to his prosperity, particular as Rufus had been in his dress. If I took that house, with him in it, it would mean—what? That's what I did not know, and that's why I hesitated. As I saw the matter, it could mean nothing pleasant. Turn because of him? I did not know which was the way of wisdom. If I had loved Rufus, as I once wished I could do, I suppose there would have been no question in my mind as to what I would do. If love were then out of the question, then how much farther away it was now. The decision must come of the head and not of the heart. There was, however, one sure thing that glared

at me, and that was the fact that I had to have a means of support. I believed that rooming-house was the best chance I had, and I might have it on long, easy terms. So, after sleeping over the matter, I decided to take the house.

Upon moving in, I set about my work with the intention of allowing circumstances to aid me in the renewed acquaintance with my husband. I was in the house a week, and saw Rufus sometimes when he came in and sometimes when he went out, but I did not yet know whether he recognized me or not. There was no reason why he shouldn't if he chanced to look at me. At last one day he came straight into the room that I called my office. I was sitting at the desk. I had just received the weekly payment from one of my tenants; but the tenant had left the room, and there was no one in there at the time except myself.

"I'd like to ask you a question, Stella," were the words with which my husband greeted me. "Why under the sun did you follow me here? I thought by coming 'way off to the city nobody would ever find me. Now you've come to the very house where I'm living, and I understand you are running the house. Did you follow me up in the first place, thinking you would make me support you? If that's the case, I can tell you right now that it is as much as I can do to take care of myself."

"No; I didn't," was all I could say. I was indignant.

"Well, then if you didn't come for that pur-

pose, I 'spose it's all right. You are running the house, are you?"

"I am."

I hadn't recovered from my indignation, and I made my answer short.

"You expect me to pay you the same as anybody, do you?"

"I have to meet expenses, and the room you occupy is a part of my stock in trade."

"Which is saying that you expect me to pay you."

"Why not?"

"It's kinder small of you, Stella, I think, to make me pay you for a room when you've got a whole house full of 'em."

Evidently Rufus had gone down in the scale of manhood. I believed there was a time when he would not have thought of talking that way. He would not have taken that view of the situation.

"This is the day to pay," he continued, "but I haven't got the money in hand now."

He turned towards the door, hesitated, and then went out.

"My stars!" I exclaimed, and jumped up from my chair to gain relief. "I see what it will be. I see now well enough. It means that I shall have to support him. Great day! and all the rest. Now, that's terrible after the time that I have had myself. I am of good notion just to ask him for his room."

At that point in my soliloquy there was a tap on the door and a lady entered. The lady wore a black velvet suit and a hat covered with

ostrich feathers. A pink and white complexion was deftly concealed a bit behind her veil. She looked young, and yet I was aware of the arts that made her so. She was a roomer in the house when I came, and I learned that she was a semi-invalid. One would not guess that condition by looking at her. She was pleasant, even cordial in her manner to me. On that occasion she inquired:

“How are you today, Mrs. Dale?” Then she laid a bill on the desk, saying it was her rent. She brought with her a strong odor of perfume. “You will pardon me for being personal,” she remarked, “but do you know what you remind me of?”

“About the most undesirable thing I could mention, I have no doubt; but I don’t know what to call it.”

“No; you make me think of a *cameo*; some rare specimen. Your clean-cut features and your high-born expression. Pardon me, Mrs. Dale; but to me you seem out of place in the work you do.”

“That’s because I do not do it the best in the world, I suspect.”

“Not that at all. It’s that you belong to a different sphere. Where you would best fit would be in the position of a society queen. Whenever I see you, I invariably think of a *cameo*.”

“That’s surely enough to lift one’s spirits,” I said in grateful recognition of the compliment that the Plumed Lady, as I thought of her, paid me. “I’ll try not to be very bad after that.”

I mean where you will find it out," I concluded with a little laugh.

"You couldn't be. It's as plain as day in your face that you have fought battles and have won them, that you have come out on the noble side. You could not wear that cameo face of yours and do otherwise."

The complaint was like a soothing lotion to a sore, though I feared the lady saw me through some special medium of her own.

"I must see my doctor today," the Plumed Lady declared in a changed tone of voice. "I am very nervous this morning. Have you ever suffered from nervousness? Terrible, dreadful! Still Doctor Folk has helped me more than any one else has done. You are a stranger here, aren't you? I want to tell you if ever you get sick you must send for Doctor Folk."

"Doctor Folk?" I repeated; making the silent comment, "Well, I guess I won't."

The Plumed Lady passed out of the room at one door and Philip entered at another.

"Oh, she's gone, ain't she?" Philip said in a dejected manner. "I wanted to ask her about Doctor Folk. I wonder if he's my doctor? Do you s'pose he lives here? Gracie and me was listenin' at the keyhole and heerd what the lady said."

"Philip, if ever you let that lady or any one else in this house, see you dressed that way, I'll disown you sure."

I shook my fist at the offender as I used to do sometimes when I was a girl and he displeased me.

“Now you get into that suit I showed you, whenever you are here—the first thing! You shave and have your hair cut, too. I can’t have you around looking like that.”

Philip took my storming as meekly as possible. I supposed he hadn’t had anything like that in a good while. Finally he asked:

“You don’t mind if I keep this what I got on as a business suit, do you?”

“If you are attached to it and think it’s appropriate, you may do as you like about that; but you don’t wear it around here.”

“When will the lady be back, you ’spose?”

“I do not know.”

“I have to shave, you say?” asked Philip in dejected tones.

“You certainly do. Philip!” I called, as he was leaving the room, “have you seen anything of my new curtain-rods, the ones I brought home yesterday and you and Grace were looking at?”

“Oh, yes; them shiny little fellers.”

“Yes.”

“Don’t know. Gracie and me didn’t do nothin’ with ’em. Did we, Gracie? Yer maw’s little—what do you call ’em?”

Grace was in the adjoining room, playing with her toys on the floor.

“Philip laid ’em back on the table, Mother, when we got through looking at them—the very place where he found them. You mustn’t fuss at Philip, Mother; he’s good.”

I knew that the kindness and attention of Philip was already enriching the life of my

little girl. I could recall what they meant to my own childhood. Grace stood much more in need of them than had I. I appreciated that in Philip's character, to be sure, but the poor soul had a provoking side also. It was that side which ruffled my temper, as it did of yore, but it called forth memories of bygone days and after all proved a blessing to me, and I thought to Philip.

Shortly I set about work in the linen closet, which was on the second floor, and gave no more thought to Philip or to Grace, until the two thrust themselves upon my notice simultaneously. I heard people passing about the house, but that was a usual occurrence and there was nothing in it to attract especial attention. So I was not aware that the two scamps paid a visit to the room of the Plumed Lady until Philip came rushing into the linen closet where I was, with Grace in his arms. They both laughed so much that I was obliged to wait a while for an explanation. I certainly wanted an explanation of Philip's fantastic costume, though he wore the suit that I had ordered him to put on. In addition he wore a corset on the outside, which I had certainly not ordered him to wear, and a much-trimmed hat besides. Gracie held my lost curtain-poles in her hands.

"Whenever you can tell it, out with it," I said at length.

"You won't get mad now, Stella, will you?" Philip begged.

"I don't promise. What have you done?"

"Don't scold Philip," pleaded Grace.

“Well, sir, I thought she had come back—that lady, you know,” spoke Philip in explanation. “So I dressed up in my duty suit, and me and Gracie went to call on her, but she wasn’t there. We knocked several times. Then we opened the door and marched in.”

“Why in the world did you take it into your head to pay a visit to that lady?”

“Well, that’s a secret me an’ Gracie has. I have heerd you say it wasn’t best to tell all you know. So ’taint. We had a very nice time, anyhow. We seen a heap o’ curious things. I tried on some of ’em, and Gracie tried on some. I looked in the closet and found yer curtain-poles.”

I took the little brass rods that Grace held out to me. Sure enough they were either mine or exactly like them. They were mine, for there was my address on the wrapper, as I had told the clerk to write it. How strange!

“There were lots of other things in there,” continued Philip. “Have you lost anything else?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Here’s my doll that you brought me,” said Grace, holding out that article so that I could see it. It was the doll that had mysteriously disappeared.

“Oh, I’d never believe it of that lady,” I spoke, betraying my astonishment. Then after second thought, I added: “She’s afflicted. Because of her affliction she takes things that do not belong to her, even things she has no use for. You must not mention the discovery to any one in the house, or to any one anywhere

else, either of you. Do you hear? Philip, how do you account for the corset and the hat?" I added with a little severity.

"I was jest dressin' up in them to let Gracie see, and we seen the woman comin' along the sidewalk, an' we knowed she'd ketch us ef we didn't light out. Listen. There she is now. In her room. Glad we got out. Ain't you, Gracie?"

"Yes," answered Grace, from the chair on which she had been placed, and laughed.

Philip proceeded to remove the articles of clothing that he had borrowed of the lady.

"I'll take them back the next time she goes for a walk," he announced with decision.

"You mustn't do things like that. The roomers will find out and they will all leave."

"Jest remember I wouldn't have got into this scrape ef it hadn't a been Gracie an' me had to see the lady on business. We have got to see her yit sometime."

"What business, I'd like to know, have you and Grace got with the Plumed Lady? 'Tend to your own business and keep out of trouble."

"You will like it, Mother," said Grace, "but we are not goin' to tell you about it."

XIII

One day a little later Philip answered the door-bell. I was not aware whether he knew who it was that rang the bell or not. Anyhow he admitted the caller, and then dropped to his knees and embraced the legs of the man.

"Likely I wouldn't have been alive ef it hadn't been fer you," he said at length.

"Get up and tell me about yourself," remarked the man, laying his hand on the shoulder of Philip. "Hope you have found life good enough to be glad I saved it, if save it I did."

"Things haven't gone so smooth with me, fer that matter, Doctor," answered Philip, rising, "but I am not sure how much worse off I might have been without you. I don't believe I'd a known you ef I had met you out somewheres," Philip added, after a survey of Doctor Folk. "You are lookin' a little older. Doctorin' people ain't the easiest business in the world, I take it. After you've seen the lady upstairs (I 'spose that's who you have come to see) I wisht you would take a look at Gracie."

"Gracie?" repeated the doctor with a rising inflection.

"Gracie Dale—Stella's, Miss Stella's, little girl, you know. Poor little critter can't walk. If anybody kin cure her I know you kin. You see, I stand as her protector now; Miss Stella's and hers! 'cause they haven't got nobody else to count on. So it has become my duty. Before

you leave, please, be sure to see about settin' Gracie to walkin'."

"All right, all right. I shall be gad to do anything that I can."

The doctor moved toward the stairs. Philip kept watch in the hall, awaiting the return of his friend. At last he was able to lead Doctor Folk to the room where Grace sat in her wheeled chair, dressing her doll. As the doctor entered, a man rose from a seat near Grace. The two men stood for a moment, staring at each other. Neither was sure who the other was until Philip accomplished the feat of introducing them. Philip said:

"This is Doctor Folk, the great doctor that saved me for a life of usefulness, an' this other one is Gracie's paw—what was. His name is Mr. Dale."

The doctor extended his hand, and Rufus took it. It was the first knowledge that Doctor Folk had of the presence of Rufus in the house, or of his whereabouts at all. I had never seen the doctor myself when he had called at the house to attend the Plumed Lady. So, since I had taken the house, we had known nothing of each other except what was told us.

The two men seated themselves near the wheeled chair, and Doctor Folk opened a conversation with Grace. Philip stood near.

"You can make me walk, can't you?" Grace asked. "Philip said you could. You mustn't tell Mother. We want to see what she will say."

The doctor lingered a half-hour, perhaps, and then rose to leave.

“What you think?” Philip inquired with deep concern.

Doctor Folk did not answer Philip then, but looked at Rufus. Rufus did not open his mouth until the doctor was quitting the room, and then he said, “Good-day, sir.” Philip followed to the hall, where he learned that Doctor Folk considered it necessary to consult me. He showed disappointment at that turn of affairs, but he yielded. He went from one room to another until he found me, and then hastened to conduct the doctor to me without giving me notice of his coming. I held a broom in my hand at the time, and was arrayed in dust-cap and apron. The doctor smiled as he entered the room. The smile may have been one holding out hope to me of that which he came to speak.

“I understand that you do not know what is in the wind,” he said. “Come, sit down. Philip, good fellow, you may go 'long. I think it can be done. Not sure, but think so. That's what you want to know?”

Philip jumped several inches from the floor. Upon coming down he repeated his antics. He ran from the room, banging the door behind him.

“From what I have learned of the child,” the doctor began, “I believe an operation will enable her to walk. I'll have a more thorough examination before I decide positively on the operation. The condition is an unusual one.”

“Any particular danger in it?”

“I think not. No more than attends the average operation. I don't see why you have not called my attention to this before.”

"Kindness itself, my dear sir; but have you no idea of the fitness of things? Didn't you meet my husband in there?"

"Yes, and I was a little staggered at the time. I thought he was gone forever."

"I believed he was still alive."

"I make a guess that you are in more need of help than you were before he turned up."

I burst out crying. I couldn't help it. Doctor Folk laid his arm around my shoulders, saying:

"That's all right. Just cry ahead. It will do you good. You have had a hard road to travel, and your feet were tender, too. If you hadn't been possessed with rare spirit you would have given up to crying, only crying, long ago."

I did cry. The doctor remained silent with his arm around my shoulders. As my storm subsided, he said:

"There is no reason in heaven or on earth, that I can make out, why I shouldn't be a friend to you. It seems to me that circumstances directly and strongly give me that sacred trust. If I were a bear, or worse, I can see how you, a refined woman, would want to have nothing to do with me; but I am not. I claim to be a gentleman."

I wiped my eyes and smiled into his face. I wanted to hug him for his pure goodness. At that moment the latch clicked and the door opened, and there stood—my husband. Rufus looked straight at me for several minutes—an age, it seemed, and then he said:

"I thought it must be somebody. I didn't know who."

Doctor Folk jumped to his feet.

"If you breathe a word of slander against this pure woman, I'll put you where you ought to be," he said fiercely.

"No; I won't say anything about it," Rufus answered in mild tones, leering at me; "that is, if you will let me stay on here."

"Confound your hide, man; you *have* sunk low!"

"Be careful what you say, sir. I might tell what I just saw."

"You saw me trying to comfort the best woman in the world, whose life you have spoiled. Furthermore, you should know that the restoration of your own child was under consideration."

"That's just a blind."

The doctor hurried out of the room, and immediately left the house. Rufus laughed an accusing laugh, and turned to speak to me. I ran from the room and up the stairs, into the linen closet, and turned the key in the door.

Afterwards I kept out of the way of Rufus, for I realized that words multiplied would avail nothing. I believed that he was heartily glad to have some circumstance against me, if an occasion should arise wherein it would be to his interest in any way to use it. Circumstances did hold a good deal in hand for me, it seemed.

Rufus was on the down grade generally. Sometimes he appeared to be considerably intoxicated. If, as my business improved he would be only half-way respectable, I came to

tell myself, I would be willing to support him; especially if he were not able to take care of himself. I kept his room tidy. His clothes improved under my care, without mentioning them to him. I did not know how much money he made, or how much he spent. The longest conversation that was ever held between us has already been recorded in this history. I avoided him, and he seldom spoke to me even when he saw me.

To return to Grace and her chance of walking. One day a cab stopped in front of the door, and Doctor Folk and a nurse from the hospital came in. I opened wide my eyes in astonishment and inquiry. The doctor answered by saying:

“What was the use of causing you worry beforehand? We want to take little Grace with us. I’ll keep you informed about her.”

“May I not go along?” I asked breathlessly.

“Don’t want you.”

The outcome was that I got the child ready, and Philip carried her to the cab and placed her in it.

“Now, Gracie, ef they don’t treat you right at the hosspital, jest you let ’em know that you’ll tell Philip,” the much interested friend said in parting.

“All right,” answered my darling, laughing. “Goodbye, my dear old boy. Goodbye, Mother.”

XIV

Needless to say that I spent an anxious time for a while. I had great fear of the operating table. I won't live it over by telling about it. It's enough to pass through a thing like that once, and glorious to know that it is over—successfully over. My precious child lay in the balances for several days. Then the weight in favor of recovery pulled the scales. Even afterwards the act of walking was deferred for months. It came then only after most careful attention. Sometimes when I would see her during a visit, lying abed, looking very weak and frail, still without use of herself, I would grow disheartened over the possibility of her ever walking. Finally skill and patience manifested their powers. However, it was necessary for Grace to remain at the hospital for weeks and weeks. It seemed years to me. Only there could she receive the necessary aid. Yet it was well worth my anxiety. Think of her being able at last to walk! During a visit that I paid her, she requested:

“Mother, the next time you come, bring Philip with you—won't you? I want him to see me walk.”

The little patient was then learning her first steps by the aid of the nurse. Soon Philip went with me to the hospital. He showed his delight over the feat that Grace accomplished.

He had made anxious inquiry of me constantly concerning her progress. Neither could he get away from the hospital without giving vent to the pride that he took in his own wisdom.

“Didn’t I tell you, Gracie,” he said, “that *my doctor* could cure you? Philip knows more than he gits credit fer sometimes. Don’t you fergit it!”

While Grace was still in the hospital Rufus began staying in his room more and more. When I first noticed the change I wondered if he were ill; but, at the same time, I suspected something worse. For with Rufus conditions did not seem to mend. I sometimes wondered if I were to blame. Yet I honestly believe that that was a morbid view for me to take. I understood full well that the world was hard to meet, and that it required courage and strife to win in the battles of life. I knew that Rufus was at a disadvantage by nature, by training and by the force of circumstances. I sometimes thought that Judge Dale should be made to realize the mischief that his own course had wrought in the life of his son. Anyhow, I came to be sure that Rufus was giving himself up to drink. Again arose the question of what I should do. I could not have a drunken man lying around the house, and I could not send my own husband away! Besides, there was no place to send him that I could think of. One day, however, Rufus went out of his own accord and did not come back. Afterwards, he was picked up from a railroad track where he had fallen asleep, and, in his drunken sleep, run over by the train. Philip suggested that

we lay the body in a corner of the lot on which stood his house. I was grateful for the suggestion. There we placed it.

What could I have done without Philip? He was a part of my old home—the only part that was left me except that which was held in memories. I was trying one day to plan some way, or to find some way, to meet my expenses. They had run ahead of my income—away ahead when I included Grace's sojourn at the hospital. I wished very much to be independent, and not accept charity even from Doctor Folk. There may have been a portion of false pride in my attitude. Still, whatever it was it was there. As I was about to despair of finding a means of escape Philip came into the room where I was, dressed in his business suit, as he called the fantastic costume in which I found him, carrying a basket on his arm. In his hand he held a torn newspaper. From it he read:

“To be sold for taxes: A thirty-acre field belonging to the estate of H. K. Battle. Whereabouts of heirs unknown.”

“My country, Philip!” I exclaimed. “Where did you get that?”

“Where I git all my readin' matter. I git it as I go along about my business.”

“Then you picked it out of some barrel of rubbish?”

“Yes'm.”

“Let me have it.”

I reread what Philip had spoken aloud, and then I looked at the date of the paper. Why had I forgotten that thirty-acre field! It had

never occurred to me that taxes had to be paid on it. Would a message be too late? I measured the cost of a railroad ticket with the amount in my purse, rather with the amount that I thought I could command. Then the strangeness of Father's request to hold on to that field came over me. He must have had some good reason for it. It wasn't like him not to have, in spite of the fact that people called him eccentric.

"Philip," I said, "what do you know about that field? Did anything in particular ever happen there that you know of?"

"Anything ever happen? Nothin' ever happened there that I know of, unless it was just pilin' up some stumps. Your pa had me to haul all the stumps off the farm and pile 'em there. Why?"

But I did not answer at once. By and by I turned to Philip again and asked:

"Did you ever know Father to work around there among those stumps?"

"Can't say I did. Hold on; yes! I recollect seein' him come away from there about dark once. But what of that?"

The idea had never occurred to me before, but the thought then bore hard upon me that I should investigate the contents of that field. I began to think I would never be satisfied until I did so. Anyhow, there were the taxes. Oh, my!

"Philip," I answered, "we have got to go home—you and I."

"Great!" exclaimed Philip.

I at once set about my preparations. First,

I sent a despatch to a county official in regard to the taxes. Then I went to the hospital to see Grace before I left, and dropped by the office of Doctor Folk for a minute. I excused myself for going to see the doctor by thinking that he should know where I was, on account of Grace. Then Philip and I set out.

Upon arriving at the old home I had contending emotions to deal with. Finally Philip and I reached the thirty-acre field with spade and pickax. I had told Philip only a little about what we would do. He was puzzled over my wanting the tools, and still more puzzled upon my telling him to roll aside the stumps.

"Now, Philip," I said, "hold up your right hand and swear that you will never open your mouth to a soul about what we do here today."

"You are not goin' to tell me to dig up anybody's bones, air you?"

"Nobody's bones. You are the only person, Philip, that I can trust to help me in this. So you are never, never, to mention it to a soul. You hear?"

"I won't tell it, if you say not; but it's spooky business."

"I don't know myself what we will find. Roll away the stumps and let us see what is beneath."

"I put these stumps here. Mr. Battle had me to get 'em up off'n the farm an' haul 'em in an' dump 'em here. You want all of 'em rolled away?"

"Yes; let us make a thorough job of it."

"Well, here goes."

Upon taking the spade, Philip stared at me and then asked:

“Stella, can there be anything wrong with you up here, you ’spose?”

He tapped his forehead with his finger.

“The idea! You go ’long and do as I tell you. There is nothing the matter with me—but I have told you that I didn’t know what we would find.”

So Philip began throwing aside the earth without more ado. Perhaps two feet down he struck something with his pick that caused him to stop short and say:

“There ’tis. You shore ’taint nobody’s bones? I’m powerful scared.”

The truth was I felt anxious myself in more than one sense to know what was hidden there.

“Somebody’s bones,” declared Philip. “You see that box?”

“It would be a small somebody who could get into that box.”

“By Job, but it’s heavy!”

Philip managed at length to get the box to the surface. It was made of galvanized iron, as well as I could judge the material. It was about two feet long, by a foot broad and a foot high. The lid was held down by means of a rusty padlock. Philip succeeded in breaking the lock. There was my treasure! It was silver coin. I did not attempt to count it. I went to wondering what I should do with it, how I should move it. While I hung over the box, Philip fell to digging again.

“There,” he announced, “is another. I

wonder how many boxes of money you've got here."

That receptacle proved to be precisely like the other and was filled in the same way. By the time the second box was opened Philip was wild with enthusiasm over the number he might find. So he dug away and dug away until I was well satisfied that the two boxes were all. I ordered Philip to replace the soil in the opening and roll back the stumps, so that no unusual sign would be left to point out our work. My puzzle over moving my wealth was then solved by sending Philip for new locks and chains with which to fasten the boxes. While I sat there alone with my treasure, I thought of Father and realized that he had done for me just about what I had wondered why he had not done. He was a hero. That I knew. He did not miss the intricate places that life offers to be filled.

Philip borrowed a wagon from the owner of the farm, and managed to get the boxes to the depot without attracting undue attention. It was fortunate that the amount was placed in two boxes instead of in one. Doubtless Father had considered the weight. My wealth was shipped to the city.

I decided to tarry a few days in the old neighborhood, for I did not know when I should ever be there again. While I was there I accidentally met Emery Humphry. Emmy happened to be back at his old home on a visit. He was fat and almost forty. He wore a diamond ring on his finger, and looked the picture of health and prosperity. There was a beautiful young

woman, flaxen-haired and charming, whom he called his wife. She lived in the town to which Emmy went upon leaving the farm.

During a conversation my old friend remarked: "Stella, in the leisure hours of my busy life I often recall the good times that we had together in the days before the storms of life were upon us. I need sometimes to get back to them in order that their sweetness may keep the bitter of the present from corroding my better nature."

"Emmy," I answered, "sometimes, when I look back on it all, I wish I had never seen ten miles beyond my first home."

"There is no standing still, it seems. There is gain to be had thereby, Stella, even though we may pay a price for it."

"Oh, yes! I understand."

"I told you in the old days what I thought of you then. So I intend to tell you what I think of you now. I love my wife, but the love I am able to give her is due in part to the sweetness you brought into my life. She ought not to object to my saying that you fulfill in the woman the promise of the girl. You do so, if you have had a rough road to travel; and probably so because of that roughness. If I may sum you up in a few words, I'd call you 'The Cameo Lady'—for your value and your beauty."

"Emmy, you are a balm to my soul," I answered; "not because of your flattery, but because through it I perceive a friend in you still."

When I reached the city again, I kept on the

watch for my boxes until they arrived. Then at short intervals I deposited the money in a bank, until at length the greater portion of it was safe, as I thought. I knew I ran some risk in keeping so large an amount at the house as I kept there for a while, but I found comfort in the thought that no one would suspect me of having it.

Grace grew able to leave the hospital. She would walk from the front door into the room just to show Philip what she could do. I asked for the bill there, and paid it. My! how great it felt to be independent. Doctor Folk learned that I had paid the bill at the hospital, and so one day he came, on purpose to quarrel with me, it seemed. For he said:

“Now I should like to know if you have been borrowing money for the sake of being independent? Of course, I am hurt that you won’t accept from me. Yet aside from any personal feeling, I want to advise you against borrowing money. Don’t begin the habit, if you can help it.”

I teased him a little. Then I told him of my marvellous wealth. In the first place it was a very good ten thousand dollars. In the second place it seemed to me like a fabulous amount. The doctor heard me through, and said he was glad that I was happy and independent; but he didn’t seem happy himself. When he left, he even said that he hoped he would meet me again some day.

“Meet me again some day!”

XV

I troubled over that "Meet me again some day" until one morning I decided I would find out what it meant. I had not seen Doctor Folk since he said it, and several weeks had passed. In the meantime Philip had inquired of me more than once what had become of the doctor. He then got ahead of me in an interview with that gentleman. He dropped down on Doctor Folk, taking pains to make it appear, apparently, that his visit was unpremeditated. But I knew that he went for the purpose of saying exactly what he said, which was:

"You know, Doctor, I am the protector of Stella, Miss Stella, and her little girl. I don't want to leave any o' my duty undone. Sometimes when I knows a thing—I knows it."

There had been other parts in the conversation, like the other things that go with the turkey, but the turkey is the central figure. So, to repeat merely the turkey portion, Philip added:

"I knowed Stella ought to have took you in the first place. I told her so, but it didn't do no good. Girls at the marrying age air quare. Still, it ain't becomin' for you to hold it against her. She had a bad time of it, as you know, an' she's not one o' them high an' mighty sort. I believe she'll have you now ef you'll ast her."

"I don't think so," Doctor Folk answered. "I really don't think she wants me; that's the

truth. She might take me out of what she would think of as gratitude, for the little she would let me do for her and Grace. She is independent now; can do as she pleases and have what she likes. No, Philip; I don't think she wants me. I wouldn't marry any woman unless I believed I could add to her happiness."

"Gracie an' me want you. We need you in the family. We've talked it over, me an' Gracie has. Stella ought not to be so hard-headed, an' I intend to tell her so."

So on the same day on which I thought I would try for an explanation of that "Meet you again some day," before I could get to it, Philip accosted me.

"Stella," he said, "you air a smart woman about most things, I 'low, but if you don't take the doctor this time you may never git another chance at him. Better listen to Philip. He knows a lot sometimes."

I told Philip to mind his own business. Yet I determined to have a talk with the doctor the next time he called to see The Plumed Lady. I believed his feelings were wounded for some reason. After all his kindness, and everything, I could not let him think that I had intentionally hurt him. So on that very day after he saw The Plumed Lady, I called to him as he was on his way downstairs. I was in the linen closet, as it happened. I poked my head out and said:

"Doctor, please may I have a few words with you?"

He stopped and bowed politely.

“What’s the matter with you?” I asked.
“What have I done to hurt your feelings?”

“Hurt my feelings?”

Then the matter began to get straightened out. Pretty soon, well, the doctor stepped inside the closet just so he could hear me a little better, I ’sposed. If he weren’t happy over the way that matter straightened out, I couldn’t tell the difference. I’ll declare I couldn’t!

To say that I was elated after my trying experiences of life might indicate a lack of sanity in that happiness. Yet by putting aside the things that were behind me, I found happiness possible. As time went by, the strong, manly love that was mine did more than anything else could have done to heal the old wounds.

It should be added that on every anniversary of my marriage to Doctor Folk, Philip has not neglected to say:

“I was the one who made the match. Wasn’t I, Doctor?”

The doctor has answered invariably:

“You doubtless had something to do with it, my good fellow.”

To me he has said:

“I can see only the one woman in all the world—and she’s my Cameo Lady.”



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